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The Life and Times of Tennyson

from 1809 to 1850

Thomas R. Lounsbury

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THE LIFE AND TIMES OF TENNYSON

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THE LIFE AND TIMES OF TENNYSON

[FROM 1809 TO 1850]

BY

THOMAS R. LOUNSBURY

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INTRODUCTION

Professor Lounsbury's name, I suppose, is most closely associated by the public with his studies in Chaucer and Shakespeare. His literary taste, however, was singularly catholic. Pope and Dryden, for example, appealed to him strongly because of their pugnacity and the keenness of their satire. Their poems he knew intimately, and he often quoted passages from them in conversation, not always accurately but rather by way of a paraphrase which gave new edge to an epigram. Of later poets the ones he read most were Byron, Browning, and Tennyson. From any one of the three, he would repeat, when in the mood for it, long stretches running to hundreds of verses. Among the poems of Tennyson which he sometimes recited were 'Locksley Hall,' the 'Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington,' and parts of 'Maud,' 'The Princess,' and 'In Memoriam.' Many of the quotations in this volume were first written out from memory.

This admiration for Tennyson began in youth and continued through a long life. It was his habit when a schoolboy to clip from the newspaper any new production of the poet and paste it in a scrapbook, first, I daresay, committing the lines to memory; and the most notable essay that he wrote while in college was a defence of 'Maud' against hostile criticism.

Long afterwards, when the second 'Locksley Hall' made its appearance, he contributed to 'The New Englander' a most illuminating contrast and comparison between this poem and the one of sixty years before bearing the same name. The last lectures which he gave at Yale, a decade ago, were on Tennyson and the poet's early contemporaries. Always, the man who had lived through the greater part of the Victorian era set himself squarely against the wave of cheap depreciation which at times threatened to overwhelm Tennyson. Though he admitted the poet's limitations, he insisted upon his greatness.

It was while Professor Lounsbury was in the midst of his lectures that he planned a literary biography of Tennyson. He never expected to cover the poet's entire career, but he hoped that he might come down to the publication of 'The Idylls of the King.' When compelled to stop he had reached 'In Memoriam,' though he had collected most of his materials for the subsequent decade. In no wise was his book intended as a rival to other biographies of the poet, least of all as a rival to the 'Memoir' of Tennyson by the poet's son. "That work," Professor Lounsbury remarks in notes which he had made towards a preface, "must always be the final authority on the points it deals with directly. All other biographies are under obligations to it. My own obligations are sufficiently shown by the numerous facts borrowed from it, which are duly acknowledged on page after page." At the same time, he goes on to say: "It is a matter of supreme difficulty for one who is united to a man by

the closest of personal ties to tell satisfactorily the story of his life. Especially is this so in the case of a son. He cannot say anything in censure. Coming from him, it would seem an act of impiety towards a dead man. Equally he cannot say anything in praise, even that which all the rest of the world would feel to be justly due. It would be attributed in his case to filial affection, not to the conclusion of an impartial judge. Hence whatever appreciation he introduces must come from the outside. Others must be brought forward to say for him what he cannot say for himself without being subjected to malevolent criticism. Such a method of conveying an estimate is always unsatisfactory.'' This comment on the procedure of the poet's son presents clearly Professor Lounsbury's point of view. Free from the trammels of relationship, he will always speak out as an unbiassed critic in just praise and blame. This is what he did years ago in his 'Life of James Fenimore Cooper.' In no other way can one arrive at a true appraisal of a writer. Professor Lounsbury's studies may be regarded as supplementary to the 'Memoir' by Hallam Tennyson.

The title which the author chose for his book was 'The Life and Times of Tennyson.' Had the work been brought nearer to completion, this would have more properly described its scope than it does now. Still, even in that case, there would have been need of a brief explanation. It was not Professor Lounsbury's purpose to relate anew those well-known incidents in the poet's life which may be easily found

elsewhere. What he ever kept in mind was the literary career of Tennyson. From many sources, some of them very obscure, he drew such personal incidents as would contribute directly to the end he had in view. This is true even of the chapter on Tennyson's youth. Most of the material that went into those pages has a direct bearing on the poet's future career. It was a difficult chapter to write, for the boyhood of Tennyson has been passed over lightly by all who have written upon him. Indeed, none of them seems to have known much about it. No more was it Professor Lounsbury's intention to make a full survey of "the times" embraced by the poet's eighty years. That would have been a labor alike valueless and impossible. As the reader will see, he has confined his story to what immediately concerned Tennyson. So much and no more of "the times" was admitted. Accordingly certain great names of the Victorian era either are casually mentioned or are rendered conspicuous by their absence. They have to give place to men who exerted a measurable influence upon the varying fortunes of the poet's literary career. These men were obviously not Browning and Matthew Arnold; they were, for the early period, "Christopher North," John Gibson Lockhart, and scores of other reviewers whom the world has long since consigned to oblivion. The opinions of these critics then swayed the public for or against an author. This is the reason why many of them are given a new lease of life here. In a note summarizing his plan, I find Professor Lounsbury saying: "I wish to bring

out clearly not only what took place in the life of the poet during the period in question, but the situation in which he found himself as regards literature, the hostility which he encountered at the outset of his career, and the circumstances which brought it about and the influences that were at work both to create it and to dissipate it. This is a field which has been touched upon by none of his biographers, or if touched upon merely alluded to.'' Though Professor Lounsbury was compelled to shorten the period he once had in mind, he has here depicted Tennyson's long struggle for recognition down to the great triumph of 'In Memoriam.' It is the part of the poet's career that has the greatest human interest.

An account of how Tennyson impressed his contemporaries involved, first of all, a consideration of the critical literature of the time. ''I have gone over,'' says Professor Lounsbury, ''every article of Tennyson which appeared in any quarterly, monthly, or weekly of importance, whether in England or America, from 1830 to 1855. Nor have I confined myself to reviews which dealt directly with the poet. There is no article dealing with the literary situation or with the other writers of the period which I have not read with more or less care.'' It is quite evident that these statements may be extended, with some reserves, to the daily newspapers which contained literary notices. In these unworked mines, Professor Lounsbury discovered fresh material for his volume. Sometimes he used to grumble at the labor, but in his very heart he thoroughly enjoyed it. Time often renders old views

and old opinions so absurd that they become a source of delight to a man having Professor Lounsbury's extraordinary sense of humor. He finds "men extolled to the skies whose names are now forgotten, and men contemptuously decried whom the world now cherishes as the greatest representatives of their age." Through all this critical literature Professor Lounsbury slowly ploughed his way. Some readers, he apprehended, might object to his frequent extracts from it. Them he would console by declaring that he had refrained, out of regard to their sensibilities, from quoting scores of passages which he might have adduced to illustrate further the views once current concerning Tennyson.

By way of parenthesis, it may be observed that Professor Lounsbury placed a very low estimate on the intrinsic value of the criticism contemporary with the poet. After admitting that he has met with some articles still worth reading, he goes on to say: "The chief impression produced upon me by them taken as a whole is the general worthlessness of most contemporary criticism. Especially is this true of works of the imagination. When it comes to the description of matters of fact, superior knowledge may point out errors of detail, but where taste and culture are the leading factors, we never have much more than an expression of the reviewer's likes and dislikes. . . . After a careful examination of the criticism which Tennyson received during the twenty-five years under consideration, it is well within bounds to declare that nine tenths of it is not worth the paper on which it was written, and that no small share of this nine tenths

is discreditable to the men who wrote it and to the periodicals in which it appeared." Why, then, it may be asked, should one consider it? Why disturb the dead? Because in contemporary criticism and nowhere else lies the literary biography of Tennyson.

While engaged upon this book, Professor Lounsbury's eyes, never very good, failed him for close and prolonged work. At best he could depend upon them for no more than two or three hours a day. Sometimes he could not depend upon them at all. That he might not subject them to undue strain, he acquired the habit of writing in the dark. Night after night, using a pencil on coarse paper, he would sketch a series of paragraphs for consideration in the morning. This was almost invariably his custom in later years. Needless to say, these rough drafts are difficult reading for an outsider. Though the lines could be kept reasonably straight, it was impossible for a man enveloped in darkness to dot an *i* or to cross a *t*. Moreover, many words were abbreviated, and numerous sentences were left half written out. Every detail, however, was perfectly plain to the author himself. With these detached slips of paper and voluminous notes before him, he composed on a typewriter his various chapters, putting the paragraphs in logical sequence. His next step was to subject his typewritten copy to extensive revision with pen and ink. Subsequently he had a fair copy made for him by one more expert in manipulating the typewriter. Nor did composition end there. Besides having highly developed the instinct of the literary artist, Professor

Lounsbury strove at all times for perfect accuracy. Before letting his manuscript finally go to the printer, he went over it again with extreme care, modifying where necessary his statements of fact, and rephrasing many sentences in order to gain the effects he aimed to produce. Such was his usual procedure.

It is accordingly to be lamented that none of the chapters printed here received Professor Lounsbury's final revision. All but three of them, however, had reached the stage of the second typewritten copy; and on several of these he had indicated some of the alterations which he wished to make; but he had not proceeded far with this work—in no case through an entire chapter. Whenever it was clear just what he desired, I have made the emendations; otherwise I have ventured upon no change except where a wrong word had evidently slipped into the text, or where a quotation was not quite literally given. Of the three remaining chapters the fourteenth was nearly ready for the second typewritten copy, but was being withheld for additions the nature of which is not apparent. The first chapter, which deals with Tennyson's youth, was in a less satisfactory condition. Several of the paragraphs Professor Lounsbury planned to modify and reconstruct in the light of further study; and the views which he illustrates near the close on the precocity of great poets were not fully developed there. Indeed, the chapter, as he left it, broke off at the beginning of a sentence. In order to give an appearance of completeness to this chapter, I have transferred to it a few passages from one that comes

midway in the book. Except for this and a few minor corrections, it was necessary to let this chapter stand in its incomplete state. The greatest perplexity arose over what to do with the last chapter—the one on 'In Memoriam.' With the theme of this poem Professor Lounsbury's mind was filled during the last weeks of his life. Whenever his health permitted, he wrote out various paragraphs in pencil, and he had begun to organize them into a whole when the end came. Much that he designed to say about 'In Memoriam' the reader will find in this chapter as I have attempted to piece it together; and some passages will as surely be found there which would have been discarded had Professor Lounsbury lived to complete it. Most of all, his friends will miss those remarks on the poem which they have heard from him in conversation and which he intended to incorporate into this or a succeeding chapter. There exist also partial outlines for chapters on the Wellington 'Ode' and on 'Maud'; but they are too faint and uncertain to follow. They contain, however, certain observations of a general nature which I have inserted near the end of the chapter on 'In Memoriam.'

In preparing the manuscript for the press, I have received much aid from Miss Helen McAfee, who has verified the quotations. Mr. Andrew Keogh of the Yale University Library has kindly read all the proofs, and has supervised the preparation of the index. For myself, I have to say that this last book of Professor Lounsbury's is here presented to the public as nearly as possible in the form which in my opinion he would

have desired. Nothing that he ever wrote better displays his remarkable qualities as a literary historian, his brilliant wit and humor, and that mastery of style which places him among the foremost prose writers of recent times.

Wilbur L. Cross.

Yale University, September, 1915.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF TENNYSON

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CHAPTER I

TENNYSON'S EARLY YEARS

The county of Lincoln, the second in size of the English shires, is, so far as about one third of its area is concerned, a county of marshes and fens. These two words, however, as there employed, hardly convey to the reader in this country the idea that he would be likely to entertain. They mean not tracts of land covered partially or wholly with water, but cultivated soil reclaimed in one case from the sea and in the other from the overflow of streams. Accordingly they are not marshes and fens in the strict sense of the terms. They are level fields separated from each other not by fences or hedges, but by ditches and dykes. The so-called marsh in the neighborhood of Tennyson's boyhood home was a belt, from five to ten miles broad, of rich alluvial soil, stretching along the coast from the upper course of the Humber River to the neighborhood of Wainfleet, and protected from the ocean by sand dunes heaped up by the winds and waves. A few miles to the south of the place of his birth lay the much vaster fen country of the shire.

The surface of the country is for the most part a great plain. Yet in contrast to its ordinarily level character there run through it, in the general direction of north and south, two bold ranges of calcareous hills,

which rise in places to the height of two or three thousand feet. The range to the west is called the Cliffs, that to the east the Wolds. The latter extends from Barton-on-Humber to Spilsby. Towards its southern extremity and situated between low hills, lies the village of Somersby. It is rather entitled to the designation of hamlet. It is a very small place now, and such it seems to have been always. In fact, it is too small to be found upon any but the largest maps; early in the nineteenth century it contained not many more than half a hundred inhabitants. At that time the rector of the parish was the Reverend George Clayton Tennyson. He was a man of lofty stature, of great physical strength, and of wide interests and tastes in many different directions. He paid attention to poetry, to painting, to music, and to architecture. He designed and built as an addition to the rectory a Gothic-vaulted dining-room, where on winter evenings his family gathered and spent the time in games and music and readings from favorite authors. In the rear of the house was the lawn which sloped down to the garden, along whose edge ran the little brook which played no unimportant part in the life of the children. Adjoining the garden was the orchard.

George Clayton Tennyson had married Elizabeth Fytche, the daughter of the vicar of Louth. Twelve children were the fruit of this union. Of these eight were sons. The first-born, George, died the year of his birth. Of the eleven others, the eldest was Frederick, born in 1807, the second Charles, born in 1808, and the third Alfred, who was born in 1809. Unlike

the father all the children, with a single exception, passed the threescore and ten years allotted to man's life on earth. Some of them approached fourscore and several passed that mark. "The Tennysons never die," was the almost despairing cry of that one of the sisters who was engaged to Arthur Hallam, in the midst of the utter prostration of mind and body which followed the death of her lover. Tennyson himself had passed by two months his eighty-third birthday at his death, and five of his brothers and sisters survived him, one of them, Frederick, the oldest of all.

One of the petty controversies connected with the poet's life has arisen as to the exact date of his birth. In nearly all of the later accounts it is put down as having occurred on the sixth of August. Tennyson himself asserted that it took place on the fifth. His testimony to that effect is given by Canon Rawnsley to whom it came from the poet directly. "I had it," wrote the canon, "from Lord Tennyson himself that, though the 6th is popularly put down as the date of his birth, it really took place a few minutes before midnight of the 5th."[1] In spite of his necessary presence on the occasion his independent testimony cannot be deemed of much value, certainly it is not conclusive. At that time he could not be expected to have any recollection of the event, even if in it he inevitably bore a particularly prominent part. But according to the advocates of this date, his statement is borne out by the evidence of one much better informed. In their

1 'Memories of the Tennysons,' by H. D. Rawnsley, 1900, p. 3.

opinion the father labored under the same impression as the son. Tennyson's baptism took place on the eighth of August. The record of the fact appears in the parish register written in the rector's own hand. Under the date mentioned there is the following entry:

Alfred, son of George Clayton and Elizabeth Tennyson born August 5th.

Against this view the advocates of the later date maintain that the fifth is due to a misreading in the parish register. This assertion was made long ago while the poet was still alive by one who professed to have examined with the greatest care the father's entry. According to his account the 6 had been mistaken for a 5, "the top of the back stroke being somewhat square and pointing to the right, and the ink at the back, or left, of the loop is rather faint; but under a magnifier it can be traced through all the figure."[1] At all events this date has been adopted in what may be called the official life of the poet. The fact seems to be that he was born about midnight, and so his birth could properly be assigned to either the fifth or the sixth day. Still, as there has now come to be a pretty general agreement on the adoption of the later date, that will doubtless continue to be considered as his birthday.

In 1832, Arthur Hallam, visiting the home of the Tennysons, is said to have remarked, "Fifty years hence people will be making pilgrimages to this spot."

[1] C. J. C. in 'Notes and Queries,' March 14, 1891.

He certainly wrote in 1831 to Tennyson's sister that many years and even many ages after they were all laid in dust, young lovers of the beautiful and the true would seek the region where the mind of the poet had been moulded in silent sympathy with the everlasting forces of nature; would point out the places which he would be supposed to have celebrated. Something must of course be pardoned to the enthusiasm of strong personal attachment; perhaps even more to the fact that the speaker was very much in love with his friend's sister, and human nature is so constituted that a circumstance of this sort has a tendency to check the preservation of a calm and judicial attitude of mind towards the qualities characterizing that sister's brother. There is no question, however, that in this case the prediction has been fulfilled. Pilgrimages were made to the spot within less than fifty years afterward. They will doubtless continue to be made when many additional fifty years have gone by. Still, it is not necessary to attribute an inspired clearness of vision to the utterance. How many are the unfulfilled predictions of this sort for which at the time there appeared the amplest justification to their utterers! They have been proclaimed in all sincerity by the easy admiration of youth, reinforced by the magnifying power of personal attachment. When the predictions are not realized, as too generally they are not, we no longer recall them, we forget, in fact, that they were ever made. But the one success in prophecy makes infinitely more impression than a hundred failures, and we cite its verification as a proof of special insight.

In the rectory of the little village, with four poplars then standing before its door, and a brook flowing just below its garden, the childhood and most of the early youth of Alfred Tennyson were spent. Of this period of his life, in spite of the numerous biographies of him which have been written, we have largely to content ourselves with generalities. For this the poet himself was mainly responsible. He was particularly hostile to anything in the shape of reports of his sayings and doings, to secure which seems frequently to be the specially engrossing desire of the modern author. This attitude was as marked in his early years when no one sought to gather information about him as it was in his later when every one was seeking to secure it at any cost. Then as afterward he held himself aloof from others in the intercourse of private life. He was averse to having his personality made in any way conspicuous before the public, or to attracting its attention by the disclosure of what he thought and said. Yet if certain accounts are to be trusted, he would have gained far more by such revelations than he would have lost. His intimate friend, FitzGerald, was wont to express regret that the casual utterances of Tennyson were not preserved. They were, he declared, sayings to be remembered, decisive verdicts. "Had I continued to be with him," he wrote to a friend in 1872, "I would have risked being called another Bozzy by the thankless World; and have often looked in vain for a Note Book I had made of such things."

This notebook has been found and printed. The reported sayings upon which FitzGerald laid so much

stress, when read in cold blood, hardly justify the praise he lavished. Nothing he has preserved would lead the reader to believe that much would have been lost by silence. This is far, however, from being an uncommon experience. Vapid and lifeless, not to say dull, are often the words when read, which seemed so full of sparkle and charm and brilliancy when heard. Such instances are frequent in the case of men whose conversation has attracted and delighted numbers, but cannot stand the test of publication. The success of the sayings depends at the time on other things than upon what is actually said. The effect produced upon the hearer has not been so much due to the words themselves, or even to the thought or the way in which the thought has been expressed. It is rather the result of attendant circumstances—the sympathetic audience, the by-play that leads up to the utterance, the aptness of the introduction to the comment made upon the subject under discussion, the looks and gestures and intonations with which the sentiments conveyed are accompanied and enforced. Detached from the agencies which contribute to the immediate impression, the effectiveness of the words uttered disappears. Committed to print, they lose the point and force which belonged to them when spoken.

Still, the words of a man of genius are well worthy of preservation without regard to their intrinsic value. The world is neither disposed to be thankless for the gift of the most trivial utterances of its greatest men, nor to blame the giver. There is no doubt, however, as to the state of mind any such action would have

inspired in Tennyson himself. His own feelings are distinctly expressed in that verse of 'Will Waterproof's Lyrical Monologue,' when he speaks of that remote past when the great writer could give freest utterance to his thoughts and emotions with no fear of the reporter that travels in darkness or of the interviewer that wastes at noonday:

> Hours, when the Poet's words and looks
> Had yet their native glow;
> Nor yet the fear of little books
> Had made him talk for show;
> But, all his vast heart sherris-warm'd,
> He flash'd his random speeches,
> Ere days, that deal in ana, swarm'd
> His literary leeches.

This is far from being the only time or place in which Tennyson expressed his aversion to that remorseless publicity of modern life which waits upon him who has lifted himself up to a high position among his fellow men. Both in his writings and in his conversation he took in this matter the extremest of extreme ground. In one of his poems he manifested his feelings with a vehemence that amounted almost to bitterness. This is the one now entitled, 'To ——— after reading a Life and Letters.' The person whom he is addressing is generally supposed to be his brother Charles; the 'Life and Letters' which he read, to be the biography of Keats prepared by Milnes, and published in 1848. Tennyson seems later to have desired to disclaim the idea that he had in mind this particular volume. The only reason apparent for this implied

denial of the reference to the work is that it might be construed into an attack upon a personal friend. In truth, in his journal, William Rossetti records an assertion of Tennyson that this particular poem was written by him "in a fit of intense disgust" after reading Medwin's journal of the 'Conversations of Lord Byron.' It is so easy for the most honest of reporters to give a wrong impression of what has actually been said that the reader may be permitted to doubt that the poet ever made any unqualified assertion of this sort. It may be that Medwin's work was mentioned by Tennyson as one of those he had in mind. But in itself it could never have been the inspiration of the sentiments expressed in this particular piece.

The lines contained a peculiarly strong manifestation of his personal feelings. They were originally printed in 'The Examiner' for March 24, 1849. Later they were included in the sixth edition of the 'Poems' which appeared in 1850. It was not till the eighth edition which came out in the latter part of January, 1853, that the words "After reading a Life and Letters" were added. This makes it clear that Medwin's work could not have been the one to which reference was made. That author had not written a life of Byron, nor had he printed his letters. He simply purported to record his conversations. As, furthermore, his work appeared in 1824, it was rather late in the day to become agitated about what had been reported a quarter of a century before. The poem, it is to be added, had after its title a quotation of the last line of Shakespeare's epitaph, "Cursed be he that

moves my bones." The words had here not the slightest appropriateness. Shakespeare, or whoever wrote the epitaph, sought simply to express the natural desire that the body should be left undisturbed in the resting-place to which it had been consigned; that it should not, after the lapse of generations, encounter the fate of thousands in the crowded churchyards of England whose bones are dug up to make room for those of some newcomer to the grave. He was not thinking at all of what would be said of him after his death or what revelations would be made of his words and acts. In Tennyson's quotation from the epitaph invoking Shakespeare's curse upon those who will not let his ashes rest, he imputes by implication to Shakespeare feelings which the great dramatist pretty certainly never had, and very certainly never expressed.

Tennyson was indignant that Keats's letters should have been published. It was indicative of his general attitude. In this particular he stood at the opposite pole from that of his great contemporary. Browning entertained no objection to the curiosity felt about him and his works by "the many-headed beast"; in particular none when it sprang from respect or reverence. The indignation which some have felt and others have thought it decorous to feel at the publication of the letters which passed between him and his future wife was manifestly one with which that poet himself would not have had the slightest sympathy. There is little question that Browning, so far from being averse to this correspondence seeing the light, was at heart

anxious that it should eventually be published. He could not but be well aware that it redounded to the credit of himself and the woman to whom he had become affianced. But no feelings of this sort characterized Tennyson. His idea was that an author should be known only by his works; that his sentiments about men and things should never be disclosed; and that in particular there should be no revelation of his personal characteristics and his failings. It was in these words that in the poem under consideration he expressed his feelings towards the sort of biography for which he entertained special aversion:

> For now the Poet cannot die,
> Nor leave his music as of old,
> But round him ere he scarce be cold
> Begins the scandal and the cry:
>
> Proclaim the faults he would not show;
> Break lock and seal; betray the trust;
> Keep nothing sacred; 'tis but just
> The many-headed beast should know.

He ended the poem by contrasting the better fate of him who dies unheard to that of him who drops dead in front of Glory's temple while the carrion vulture waits to tear his heart before the crowd.

Tennyson's aversion to having anything said about himself was part of that peculiar susceptibility to criticism or comment of any sort which was not only one of his greatest weaknesses, but had a specially injurious effect upon the success of his early career. It was ingrained in his nature and influenced his whole con-

duct. To it and to its important results it will be necessary to call attention again and again. The truth is that he sought for himself two things absolutely incompatible. He desired general recognition from the public and complete privacy for himself. He who gains the benefit of greatness must be resigned to partaking of its penalties. Tennyson's genius lifted him to a position where he was known and observed of all men. Interest in what he said, interest in what he did was inevitable. He himself spoke of the fierce light which beats upon a throne; but that light beats just as fiercely upon him who occupies the throne of letters as upon him who occupies the throne of a realm. A great intellectual sovereign can no more succeed in hiding himself from the curiosity of his literary subjects than he can from their admiration and reverence. The one is a consequent of the other. It is not to the discredit of the present age, on the contrary it is distinctly to its credit, that it cares to hear more about its uncrowned kings than it does about those who are crowned.

Tennyson furthermore was utterly mistaken as to the cause that has led to woeful ignorance, in which he seems to have rejoiced, of the great writers of the past. It was not due in the slightest degree to the reticence of their contemporaries, to their lack of curiosity, or to their indifference. In all these respects the men of former centuries were not unlike the men of our own. In the days of old, the poet did not merely die and leave his music behind him as the sole reminder to his contemporaries of his existence. At his death,

then, began as much the scandal and the cry as there does now. The carrion vulture was then waiting to tear his heart before the crowd as eagerly as it waits now. The same feeling in truth has existed about the great writers of every period of the world's history. Furthermore, it is to be said that in the case of men whose achievements have lifted them above the level of the crowd, the assumed scandal and cry which arise at their death are purely a figment of the imagination, as much as is the existence of the carrion vulture waiting to tear his heart out before the crowd. The death of every really great man, be he poet, statesman, or warrior, instead of being followed by a proclamation of his faults, is marked by their concealment. His enemies, if enemies he has, are silent. His failings are kept in the background. Detraction is hushed, as his sorrowing fellow men become increasingly sensible of what they have lost. The attitude almost invariably taken is that of reverence, the sentiments expressed are those of grief and admiration. These same feelings doubtless existed in the past as they do in the present; and would naturally have found the same avenue to expression. But no means existed then of imparting to the general public what was well known in private circles. More than that, there was then no means of transmitting this knowledge to posterity. It is not to be forgotten furthermore that biography—in particular the biography of men of letters, now one of the principal staples of literary manufacture—hardly had an existence worth chronicling before the latter part of the eighteenth century. Hence the deplorably

scanty knowledge we possess of all the greatest authors of the past.

There is no question that Tennyson carried this aversion to publicity to an extreme which it requires self-restraint to call merely ridiculous. Some of the sentiments he expressed on the subject it is hard, in truth, to take seriously. In certain instances it would be paying them an exaggerated compliment to call them silly. Nothing in his opinion should be told of an author save what he himself chose to reveal personally. "The poet's work is his life, and no one has a right to ask for more," he said several times to his friend, Francis Turner Palgrave. "Reaching once," added Palgrave, "even the barbarity, as I could not help calling it, that if Horace had left an autobiography, and the single MS. were in his hands, he would throw it into the fire. And, consistently, he would never read such Lives."[1] Doubtless if such a state of things had come to actual trial, he would not have done what he said. If he had, he would certainly have deserved not only to be thrown into the fire himself but into everlasting fire, and his memory would have been held in just execration by all coming generations. But the view expressed represented after a fashion his general attitude. In a letter of his Farringford neighbor, Mrs. Cameron, written in 1860, she described him as pouring out his feelings on this subject with positive vigor and peculiar folly. The desire on the part of readers of becoming acquainted with the personal life of great authors he represented as treating

[1] 'Alfred Lord Tennyson, A Memoir by his Son,' Vol. II, p. 484.

them "like pigs to be ripped open for the public." He thanked God Almighty with his whole heart and soul that he knew nothing of Jane Austen and that there were no letters preserved either of her or of Shakespeare. More than once he expressed sentiments like these in almost the same words.

Tennyson's thanks to the Almighty had to suffer some abatement, for he lived long enough to see letters of Jane Austen published. In his opinion either nothing whatever was to be told of the person whose life was written or only that which would deprive it of the slightest interest. Accordingly he resented the portrayal of the foibles and weaknesses of great men. If a disagreeable trait was disclosed, it was to the discredit, not of the possessor, but of the revealer that the disclosure had been made. His attitude in this matter is brought out strikingly in a comment of his which seems to be regarded as redounding particularly to his credit. At Tunbridge Wells was an old lady who flourished there with some repute on the strength of having known Dr. Johnson. She cherished memories of him and repeated incidents about him. Among other things she observed that he "often stirred his lemonade with his finger and that often dirty." The observation is of no particular consequence, for it can hardly be said to add anything to what was already known. This method of stirring lemonade does not awaken Tennyson's resentment but the account of it did. That the great man should have a dirty finger and should use it improperly appeared to be in his eyes a fact which was not to the discredit of the owner

of the finger; but the relation of the fact was very much to the discredit of the narrator. "The dirt is on her own heart," he said.

There is little question that the knowledge of some of his own failings was one of the reasons that led Tennyson to resent any disclosure to the public of the infirmities of the great. Men indeed, as a general rule, are more sensitive about the revelation of their foibles than of their vices. Tennyson's dislike of personal details was to some extent based upon the knowledge that in certain particulars he was himself far from impeccable. Even in his university days his immoderate use of tobacco was a matter of offence to some of his associates; for in that earlier time indulgence in the habit was far from being so general as it became later. Still less was it practised on the grand scale in which the poet displayed it. Many indeed are the references not merely to his excessive use of tobacco but to the sort of tobacco he used. The two things did not impress favorably several of his most attached friends. To it they were sometimes wont to ascribe the ailments under which he labored. In 1838, Blakesley wrote to Milnes from Trinity College of a visit which the poet had been paying there. "Alfred Tennyson," he said, "has been with us for the last week. He is looking well and in good spirits, but complains of nervousness. How should he do otherwise, seeing that he smokes the strongest and most stinking tobacco out of a small blackened clay pipe on an average nine hours every day? He went off to-day by the Wisbeach to Epping, where he complains that there

are no sounds of Nature and no society; equally a want of birds and men.'"[1]

Blakesley lived to a good old age, but the friend he criticised survived him several years. As Tennyson persisted in smoking to the end of his life, it is reasonable to suppose that the diagnosis of the cause of his nervousness was due to the prejudices of the writer rather than to the real fact.

A more sympathetic tribute to his prowess as a smoker was given somewhat later by one who was fully competent to express an opinion on the subject. "Alfred," wrote Carlyle in December, 1842, "is a right hearty talker; and one of the powerfullest *smokers* I have ever worked along with in that department!"[2] But far greater censure fell upon Tennyson for the carelessness of his personal habits and for the slovenliness of his dress. There is more than one reference in the correspondence of this early period to the annoyance and vexation wrought by the untidiness of his appearance. So subject are we all to the domination of clothes that his indifference in these matters grieved the friendly and offended the fastidious. They did not speak of it to his enemies; but they deplored it among themselves.[3]

In Tennyson's opinion, no facts of this kind were to be mentioned. The view of biography here indicated,

[1] 'Life, Letters, and Friendships of Richard Monckton Milnes,' edited by T. W. Reid, 1891, Vol. I, p. 221.

[2] 'New Letters of Thomas Carlyle,' edited by Alexander Carlyle, Vol. I, p. 280.

[3] See in particular a letter of Henry Hallam in 'Mrs. Brookfield and her Circle,' Vol. I, p. 213.

it is fair to add, has been by no means peculiar to the poet. It is held by many in theory. By others it has been illustrated in practice, not merely to the woeful discouragement of the would-be reader but to the complete effacement from human interest and regard of the one, however brilliant and fascinating he may have been, who has been made its victim. The prevalence of this belief in the desirability of treating great men with peculiar tenderness and reticence has had the result of turning much of modern biography into a portrayal of faultless prigs or tedious bores. Abstention from repeating details of almost any sort, but especially of those which might cause annoyance or pain, is naturally the right course to follow while the man is living. During that period respect for the ordinary decencies of life would suffice to prevent any but a thoroughly vulgar soul from intruding upon that privacy which every one, not guilty of a crime, has a right to demand for himself, that freedom from the revelation to the public of his personal characteristics, of his foibles and his failings. But in the case of the dead who are worthy of our admiration, there is no reason for this restraint. What we then have a right to demand is a full and faithful portrayal of the individual as he actually was. The desire we have to learn the exactest details of the lives of those whose characters we cherish and in whose achievements we take pride, is one of the most creditable characteristics of human nature. We never admire a really great man the less because we have come to know of his weaknesses, his faults, one might almost add his vices. For

these in fact we are often disposed to love him the more, if he is worth loving at all. Without a knowledge of such characteristics the picture of the man would be incomplete. The great poet of humanity put into the mouth of Othello a representation of the attitude which should be assumed by every biographer. Nothing should be extenuated; nothing should be set down in malice. A character that cannot bear to have his failings revealed is ordinarily not worth remembering; it may almost be said that his life is not worth living. There is doubtless such a thing as too much insistence upon petty personal details. Such a representation would detract as much from the verisimilitude of the portrait as would their entire omission, and would perhaps detract even more. But that is the fault of the writer and not of the method.

Tennyson's view of the subject was manifestly different from Shakespeare's. It was the same as that of those friends of Johnson who deplored Boswell's biography as an unwarranted and loquacious revelation of every weakness and infirmity of the one whom they considered to be the greatest good man of the times. They called it treachery. Yet the reason why Johnson is so near to all of us and so dear to many of us is due to that very personal portrayal against which, had he been then living, Tennyson would have protested fiercely. By many, Boswell's picture of the man exactly as he was could not be forgiven at the time. Fanny Burney tells us that Boswell came to her for some "choice little notes," as he expressed it, upon the Doctor. She refused to help him and was much

shocked at the course he purposed to take. "We have seen him long enough upon stilts," Boswell told her. "I want to show him in a new light. Grave Sam, and great Sam, and solemn Sam, and learned Sam—all these he has appeared over and over. Now I want to entwine a wreath of the graces across his brow; I want to show him as gay Sam, agreeable Sam, pleasant Sam."[1] How much wiser Boswell was than the wisest of his contemporaries the public realizes fully now and came soon to understand then. So did the publishers who had preferred to entrust the preparation of the story of Johnson's career to the pompous Sir John Hawkins, whose formal and stupid biography was speedily extinguished by its rival. As a result of Boswell's action we have the portrayal of a living, breathing man, not of a colorless character which has hardly the vitality of a wax figure.

This aversion to the inevitable publicity which waits upon a career like his own was all the more unreasonable in Tennyson because the minutest revelation of the details of his life would have no other effect than to raise him still higher in the estimation of the world. Indeed if the character of any one prominent writer of his generation could be trusted to come out essentially unscathed from the severest scrutiny, it would be his. Such a scrutiny would reveal foibles and petty failings, and a number of peculiarities, not altogether pleasant, at times a roughness bordering closely upon rudeness, at times a frankness of speech that was occasionally hard to distinguish from brutality, which, taken

[1] 'Diary and Letters of Madame D'Arblay,' 1893, Vol. III, p. 299.

together, would save him from the curse of being mistaken for that most disagreeable of beings, a so-called saint. But it would bring out even more distinctly on account of these very blots the essential nobleness of his nature, his high sense of honor, his loftiness of spirit, and in particular his superiority to that common weakness of authors in his freedom from envy and jealousy of rival poets, even at times when for a short period they seemed about to threaten his position before the public. In this respect none of his contemporaries would surpass him; very few could stand on a level with him. To him, if to any one, belonged what he said of the Prince Consort, that he wore "the white flower of a blameless life."

With the sentiments he not merely entertained but felt deeply, it is quite impossible to conceive of Tennyson as writing an autobiography. But the keen interest now taken in the details of the life of a great author has made up to a slight extent for the failure of the man himself to furnish much information directly. It is, however, no part of the plan of the present work to spend much time in tracing Tennyson's genealogy—genealogy which is sometimes the spacious but invariably the dark and dreary vestibule to the edifice of English biography. Ancestors in general are as uninteresting a body of persons as those who concern themselves with the lives of great men come to encounter. Still, a certain degree of importance attaches to the poet's immediate forbears, his father and his grandfather. Of this latter too little knowledge has been vouchsafed. In his early life, at least, George Tenny-

son was a solicitor at Market Rasen in Lincolnshire, near which his estate of Bayons Manor lay. He was elected a representative from the borough of Bletchingley in Surrey to the last Parliament of George the Third. This met in August, 1818, and was dissolved in February, 1820, on the death of the king. The grandfather, however, did not remain a member of it during its short existence, but early in 1819 accepted the Chiltern Hundreds. In the parliamentary register, his name is given not as George, but as George Clayton Tennyson. In the course of his life he accumulated a fairly large fortune. From the few accounts of him which have come down, one gets the impression that he was possessed of a good deal more of ability than of amiability. For some as yet unexplained reason, the property seems to have been destined from an early period to pass into the hands of the younger brother Charles instead of the elder. As the grandfather lived until 1835, he survived by more than four years his natural heir. At a comparatively early period the poet's father must have been aware of the intention to disinherit him. As a sort of compensation for the intended alienation of the property, several preferments in the church were bestowed upon him; for those were the days when pluralities prevailed. He was made rector of Somersby and Wood Enderby—two adjacent hamlets—and also incumbent of Benniworth and vicar of Great Grimsby. Still, the income derived from these combined livings could hardly have amounted to more than a small por-

tion of the value of the inheritance of which he was deprived.

Tennyson's father seems to have remained on friendly terms with the brother who had been selected to take his place. But his temperament, naturally melancholy, was little likely to be soothed by the ever present consciousness of what must have been in his eyes an undeserved unkindness, not to call it injury. In any country the treatment he received would give the impression of injustice. But in England where primogeniture has for centuries been invested with a peculiar sort of sanctity, the setting aside of what would be regarded by every one as his legitimate claims could hardly have failed to fret the spirit of the elder son almost beyond endurance. It was perhaps the disgrace of being passed over that was harder to bear than the loss of the property, though that involved as a consequence comparatively narrow circumstances. He inwardly brooded over it. At times he fell into fits of despondency which cast a gloom over the whole family. No doubt this depression was to a certain extent constitutional and would have shown itself under any circumstances. Tennyson himself inherited to some degree this tendency towards it, and was occasionally subject to it even at the height of his fame and fortune. But the treatment he received would naturally increase the despondent disposition of the father. It preyed upon his spirits and probably impaired his health. Pretty surely it contributed its part towards making his life a compara-

tively short one; for he was but fifty-three years old when he died.[1]

Nor apparently was the masterful grandfather content with the exercise of parental power in diverting his estate from the eldest son. He seems to have assumed, or rather to have desired to assume, the right of directing the course in life of his son's sons. He sought to have them all enter the ministry. So far as can be gathered, their own preferences were not to be taken into consideration. His plans for their future were not, however, carried out very satisfactorily. Of the seven grandsons—all of whom grew up to manhood—Charles was the only one who became a clergyman. Even in his case the choice of the profession seems not to have been dictated by any desire to defer to the views or whims of the grandfather, but to carry out the wishes of his uncle, the Reverend Samuel Turner of Caistor, to whose property he was early the expectant and finally the actual heir. We know indeed that this crusty and eventually gouty old grandfather was looked upon with anything but regard by the children of his eldest son. There was certainly nothing in his treatment of them which would predispose them to entertain feelings in his favor. Their attitude towards him is plainly indicated in letters as yet unpublished.

The grandfather's vision of the future was no more trustworthy than his control over it was successful. At his request Alfred wrote a poem on the death of his grandmother. This took place in 1825. As a reward

[1] Born, December 10, 1778; died, March 16, 1831.

the boy received a small sum of money. Certain prophetic words accompanied the gift. "Here," said the grandfather, "is half a guinea for you, the first you have ever earned by poetry, and take my word for it, the last." It did not fall to his lot to live long enough to witness the more than utter failure of his prediction in the fortune that was to come to the grandson from this then much derided source. Yet his life was sufficiently protracted for him to be made aware that as a prophet he could hardly be deemed a success. Tennyson's father took what turned out to be a far juster view. He recognized in the early productions of his son the promise of more enduring performance to follow. "If Alfred die," he said on one occasion, "one of our greatest poets will have gone." This was not the view held by the grim old grandfather. When told the closing year of his life that his grandson had produced a volume of poems, he remarked, "I had sooner have heard that he had made a wheelbarrow."[1]

Until he went to the university, far the larger proportion of Tennyson's childhood and youth was passed in the quietude of his native place and the region immediately adjacent. The only exceptions are the years he spent in the grammar school of the not far distant market town of Louth. Thither he repaired about Christmas, 1816. He was then but seven and a half years old. His brother Charles had preceded him at a similar time the year before. There Tennyson remained for the next four years. He left it at the Christmas term of 1820, and he left it gladly. Tenny-

[1] Alfred Church's 'The Laureate's Country,' p. 63.

son never cared for the school at Louth,—it might be more accurate to say that he hated it. In fact, he liked it so little that when at that place in later life he would not go down the lane where it was situated. Nor did he believe that he got from it any benefit. There is little doubt that his opinion was correct. The truth is that the school was then of a type too generally prevalent in those days. The instruction was bad, the instructors made it worse. It was presided over by a man whom it would be a compliment to call a ruffian. Furthermore, he was a ruffian of a peculiarly bad type—that is, a conscientious ruffian. In this respect he did not differ from many, perhaps most, of the headmasters then presiding over the English public schools; and like them he was held in high esteem, not only by his fellow citizens but by the students whom he flogged. The system of education pursued, like much of that then in vogue, was better fitted for the extinguishment of the abilities of the student than for their development. Everything had to be learned by rote. To understand anything or to be interested in anything was not a matter of moment. The school was further characterized by the methods prevailing in that old system of instruction in which the belief was firmly held and assiduously carried out in practice that nothing could be expected to stay permanently in a boy's brain until it had been effectively driven in by blows upon his body. There used to be in the schoolroom, and perhaps still is, a chair impressed with the governor's seal, which represents "a master with a rod in his upraised hand and a boy crouching before him."

It was symbolic of the method followed. Teachers walked up and down the room with implements of chastisement in their hands. Ears were boxed upon every pretext, knuckles were rapped. Legs and arms furnished constant temptation for the application of the cane. Who spares the rod hates the child, was the inscription in Latin posted in full view of the schoolboys. Complaint could never be made by anyone that this proof of affectionate regard for himself and solicitude for his welfare had not been lavished on him in abundance. In all these respects the school has now undergone a great change. It is not merely different in character, but it has come to cherish the memory of its most famous pupil who did not love it, and whom the man then in charge of it apparently did not love. A white marble bust of the poet stands in the room where as a boy he studied somewhat and suffered a good deal. A sleeping section in this building bears the name of the Tennyson dormitory.

Nor further did Tennyson form any intimacies with his school companions. He pretty certainly cared for none. Mr. John Cuming Walters, who wrote a book[1] on the homes and haunts of the poet in Lincolnshire, was informed by the only surviving fellow student of Tennyson at the grammar school that even there he never knew him to associate with the other lads or to take part in their sports. He and his brother Charles were inseparable companions. They walked together, they talked together exclusively. Both were recognized as possessing ability; but neither stood high in

1 'In Tennyson Land,' 1890.

their classes. Both were strong and stalwart; but neither engaged in athletic exercises nor was seen in the playground. From such associations or rather lack of associations, from such methods of instruction, from such a system of discipline, a change to their own home could hardly have been otherwise than welcome. There it was that they spent the years which followed until they went to the university. Their father became their instructor. He would have been different from the usual run of fathers who assume that position towards their children if he had not been a rigorous one. He not merely taught them; he made them study. There is little doubt that he did not err on the side of undue leniency. As one who knew him in those days observed, he was "amazing sharp" with them. Still, it was not merely a profitable change from the methods of instruction pursued at the Louth school, it was far from being an unpleasant one in spite of general sternness and perhaps of occasional harshness. The father, too, was an excellent scholar; at least that was the repute in which he was held. In addition, for the sake of those with whose education he intrusted himself, he gave up time and labor to render more perfect his knowledge of the studies he set out to teach.

Here for the next seven years Tennyson spent his life. To one of his nature there were advantages in his confinement to this secluded region which outweighed all its disadvantages. These did not consist in the fact that the boy was far removed from the temptations of the city. Such, though different in

kind, are no worse than those of the country. But he was removed from its distractions. Somersby was one of the quietest of the quiet wold villages. For this very reason it was in certain ways well fitted for the youth of a poet. Talent usually finds its most satisfactory development amid the activities of life where it is forced to come into constant contact and occasional collision with men. But the best nursing-place of genius is retirement, which with its attendant contemplation and reflection brings the mind into frequent communion with itself.

Furthermore, the comparative solitude of his early years gave Tennyson ample time for reading and study during that period of his life when these occupations are not so important for the acquisition of knowledge they bring as for the influence they wield over the intellectual development. The absence of all disturbing elements contributed not merely to proficiency in learning but to the creation of a love for the highest literature. His father's library was an excellent one for its size. It was made up largely of the best books of the best authors in various languages. With them the children had ample leisure to familiarize themselves thoroughly. These indeed they were forced to read if they read anything; and they were fond of reading. Another advantage, therefore, of this remoteness from populous centers was that during the most impressionable period of life the boy's attention was not drawn away from the great works of the great literatures of the world by a swarm of ephemeral productions which in crowded cities are always brought

to the sight and fairly thrust themselves upon the notice of those who would ordinarily have remained unaware of their existence.

In all these respects, therefore, the conditions which surrounded the youth of the poet were peculiarly favorable. Little there was in the scenes and surroundings of his boyhood or in its occurrences to disturb the monotony of existence which pervaded the community in which his early years were spent. Few opportunities existed for communication with the world outside, or for sharing in its activities or distractions. The mail reached Somersby but two or three times a week. At the frequent summer resort of the family at Mablethorpe, there was at that time none at all, unless it came through some chance agency. Furthermore, in that sparsely settled hamlet there was but scanty society for the children outside of that which they found in their own home. The persons with whom they would most naturally associate dwelt at greater or less distance. Of some of them they saw, comparatively speaking, a good deal, if the conditions that prevented frequency of intercourse be taken into consideration. Still, the fact that such persons could only be seen at intervals naturally stood in the way of indulgence in many close intimacies. The children were in consequence largely thrown upon themselves for society. With books and talk about books, with poetry and music, they passed the days. They seem indeed to have grown up without any particular restraint. Within limits they were allowed to do about as they pleased. As, however eccentric their conduct,

there was nothing vicious in their natures, this lack of restraint was productive of nothing but good. Accordingly, when freed from the confinement of their lessons, their tendency was to fleet the time carelessly as in the golden world. "They were always running about from one place to another," an old resident told Mr. Walters, "and every one knew them and their Bohemian ways. They all wrote verses, they never had any pocket money, and they took long walks at night-time, and they were decidedly exclusive.'"[1]

Reports naturally came to cluster about the unconventional and self-absorbed ways of that one of the family who was destined to make its name famous. Stories there were of his carelessness in dress, or rather of his complete indifference to it; of his walking again and again up and down the carriage-way, shouting and hallooing while carrying a book in his hand; of his wandering off by himself with his long hair, under no restraint from a hat, floating in the wind, and without a coat to his back, talking vehemently to himself, as he wandered along the sand hills that line the coast. This was not a course of conduct to meet the approval of the staid members of that rural community. There was a very general impression among the rustic inhabitants of the region that the boy was daft. "Many a time," Mr. Walters tells us, "has Alfred been met miles away from home, hatless and quite absorbed, sometimes only realizing his situation when his further journeying was prevented

1 'In Tennyson Land,' p. 40.

by the sea.'"[1] This habit of self-absorption, seen in childhood, never left the man. The life he led in his youth would also have naturally little effect in breaking up that crust of shyness and reserve which was part of his nature. The habit of isolation which had distinguished him during his school life continued to a great extent after his return to his home. In truth, it continued during the whole of his career. Unquestionably his self-absorption and reserve contributed at times to his personal unpopularity. It furnished sufficient ground for the intruder upon his retirement to complain that he had gone to see a lion and had found only a bear.

Quiet however as was Somersby, it did not lack attractions of divers kinds to appeal to the impressionable nature of the boy. The region all about was covered with pretty hamlets, with copse woods, with roads lined with long avenues of elms, with embowered lanes; with huge moats belonging to granges which had disappeared; with manor houses and their terraced gardens rejoicing in the gorgeous flowers with which that district of country abounded; with windmills on the wolds and water-mills in the valley; with frequent churches within whose walls lay cross-legged the monuments, as it was believed, of old crusaders. Northward of the little place rose to their greatest height the chalky cliffs of the Wolds. Mounting them was a steep and treeless pike which led to the market town of Louth. From it could be seen the long stretches of level land parallel with the coast over

[1] 'In Tennyson Land,' p. 40.

whose flat surface blew at times with tumultuous fury the fierce winds of the German Ocean. From the hills the eye commands the wide expanse of the marsh with its streams of channelled waters extending from horizon to horizon and moving sluggishly towards their outlet, spanned in all directions by the frequent bridge.

Perhaps even more appealing to the poetic spirit was the long line of coast bounding the marsh on the east with its mounds of sand heaped up along the shore by the stormy waters of the North Sea, covered and held firm by the vegetation which had sprung up. All this region was familiar to the children of the household. It was the scene of much of their recreation and play. There for them was the far-receding tide of Skegness and Gibraltar Point, which left at low water a long and wide expanse of sand in which the bare-legged brothers and sisters could disport themselves for hours. There, too, was the Mablethorpe beach on which in stormy weather the plunging waves would break with thunderous roar, the tempestuous wind beating their crests into foam, driving the water up the sand dunes, and scattering far and wide the spray. The beauty of it and the might of it made an indelible impression upon the mind of the growing boy. The sea, indeed, was always Tennyson's delight. To watch the onset of the ever restless waves and listen to their roar was for him a perpetual pleasure. The feeling began in childhood and remained until the end. In later life he remembered and recorded the sentiments of his early years when he tells us he read in the Revelation of St. John of the new

heaven and the new earth which were to come when the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. "And there was no more sea," concludes the Apostle. "I remember reading that when a child," Tennyson wrote in 1848, "and not being able to reconcile myself to a future when there should be no more sea."[1]

The scenes and sights which early met his eyes are constantly reflected in his verse. Doubtless they lost something of their charm to the man himself as he grew in years. Yet as doubtlessly they became glorified in memory after he had bidden them a final farewell in order to share in the struggles of the world outside. He would then forget their discomforts and recall only their attraction. Still, when later he would return to them, they would not always be to him what he had fancied them to be. The moorland would be more barren, the shore would be more dreary. This different attitude of the mind at different times is shown in the well-known lines in which he described the fairy picture which the boy dreamed and the reality which the boy when grown to manhood came to see:

> Here often, when a child I lay reclined,
> I took delight in this fair strand and free;
> Here stood the infant Ilion of the mind,
> And here the Grecian ships all seem'd to be.
> And here again I come, and only find
> The drain-cut levels of the marshy lea,—
> Gray sand-banks and pale sunsets,—dreary wind,
> Dim shores, dense rains, and heavy clouded sea.[2]

[1] 'Memoir,' Vol. I, p. 238.

[2] Lines contributed to 'The Manchester Athenæum Album,' 1850, in 'Memoir,' Vol. I, p. 161.

It is indeed from incidental references in his own writings that we get the fullest insight into the thoughts and feelings of Tennyson's early life as well as the objects which met his gaze. One of the best, if not the best of the poems which made up the volume of 1830,[1] sets forth vividly the various scenes which were ever before his eyes. It is in the lines addressed to memory in which he paints those scenes which had impressed him peculiarly:

> Come from the woods that belt the gray hillside,
> The seven elms, the poplars four
> That stand beside my father's door,
> And chiefly from the brook that loves
> To purl o'er matted cress and ribbed sand
> Or dimple in the dark of rushy coves,
> Drawing into her narrow earthen urn,
> In every elbow and turn,
> The filter'd tribute of the rough woodland.
> O! hither lead thy feet!
> Pour round mine ears the livelong bleat
> Of the thick-fleeced sheep from wattled folds
> Upon the ridged wolds,
> When the first matin-song hath waken'd loud
> Over the dark dewy earth forlorn,
> What time the amber morn
> Forth gushes from beneath a low-hung cloud.

Perhaps even more vividly descriptive of the sights that were ever before the eyes of the boy are the lines in the same poem where he speaks of

1 'Poems, chiefly Lyrical,' 1830.

> . . . the high field on the bushless Pike,
> Or even a sand-built ridge
> Of heaped hills that mound the sea,
> Overblown with murmurs harsh,
> Or even a lowly cottage whence we see
> Stretch'd wide and wild the waste enormous marsh,
> Where from the frequent bridge,
> Like emblems of eternity,
> The trenched waters run from sky to sky.

Of his early poetical tastes and of his early efforts in verse Tennyson, for once abandoning his usual reticence, has left us a slight record. Thomson was the first poet he knew. It was rather a singular choice for a child. When about ten or eleven years old, Pope's translation of the Iliad exercised over him the peculiar fascination which it has exercised over so many poets at about this period of life. Later he fell under the influence of Walter Scott, in whose style he wrote an epic of six thousand lines. At the age of fourteen he produced a drama in blank verse. This last may have survived the destruction which has overtaken the other pieces; but if so, it has not been printed. The taste, indeed, for poetical composition was not confined to him alone of the children; it apparently prevailed in the whole Tennyson family. The father was himself addicted to the composition of verses. He never published them; but three of his sons brought out volumes of poems. Though only one of the number attained fame, there was not at the outset assurance that Alfred would be the one. Two others had their partisans. Charles, in particular, had

his advocates. FitzGerald held Frederick, the eldest of the brothers, as altogether superior. The same preference was shown by the Brownings. FitzGerald wrote to him on the subject in 1849.[1] "You and he"—by *he* he meant Alfred—"are the only men alive whose poems I want to see in print," are his words. Later he renewed the same request. "As you know," he wrote in 1850, "I admire your poems, the only poems by a living writer I do admire, except Alfred's."[2] Whether in consequence of this urgency or not, Frederick Tennyson published in 1854 a volume of poems entitled 'Days and Hours.' It was received generally with respectful and in some quarters with enthusiastic mention. But whatever success it gained was confined to the critics. With the public it never met with any peculiar favor, and its author published nothing more till 1890, eight years before his death. But his later volumes were hardly more successful than his first.

Tennyson would have been different from the rest of the world, had he not at that time fallen under the sway of the overpowering personality of Byron. He did fall under it. The story has been told again and again since its first mention how profoundly the impressionable boy of fifteen was affected when the news reached the quiet Lincolnshire hamlet that Byron was no more; how full of consternation he was; how he went off by himself and wrote on the sand, "Byron is dead." It was something almost impossible to credit.

[1] 'Letters and Literary Remains of Edward FitzGerald,' Vol. I, p. 195.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 203.

"I thought," he said, "the whole world was at an end. I thought everything was over and finished for every one—that nothing else mattered."[1] Tennyson came afterward for a time at least to share in the undue depreciation which sooner or later is sure to overtake any reputation whether duly or unduly exalted. In truth, there was a period in Tennyson's life when he indulged in that cheapest of cheap criticism which styled the poetry of Byron rhetoric. This was a vague word used to express a vague idea that Byron is not profoundly reflective, as of course the speaker always is. At a later period Tennyson took a somewhat different view. He believed that Byron's reputation would rise and that he would come to his own again. But under no circumstances could Tennyson have belonged for any length of time to the school which Byron had founded, however much his spirit might have been affected by him while his influence was most prevailing. Both in feeling and expression the two were as far apart as the poles. No proper comparison can be made between natures which had so little in common in thought and utterance. The business of comparison between great writers is in general unsatisfactory but there are instances like the present when it assumes the dimensions of the absurd.

With men who have genius for poetry, its existence is almost certain to disclose itself in early production. It perhaps hardly needs to be added that this particular method of manifesting itself is very far from being confined to men of genius. The further general

[1] Mrs. Ritchie's 'Records of Tennyson, Ruskin, Browning,' p. 12.

statement may be safely made that there is one respect in which poetical composition stands apart from other activities of the creative intellect. When once the producer has reached full maturity the quality of the product is little likely to be further improved with age. No rule indeed can be laid down which will not show exceptions. Still, it is rarely the case that he surpasses after he has reached thirty the work produced before that time. Sometimes he fails to equal it. In the career of a poet the age between twenty-five and fifty is usually not only the most productive period, but it is also the period of most satisfactory production, frequently of the only satisfactory production. Ordinarily indeed the further limit might be restricted to forty. Poetry, in truth, is a literary growth which flowers early.

This fact the writers of the Georgian era exemplify uniformly. The assertion made about them might be extended to nearly all the writers of every period. As this is a view unfamiliar to many, it may be well to add that the history of English poetry and poets bears conclusive testimony to its truth. The exceptions are but few; and even these are often more apparent than real. Chaucer, it may be, was one of them. But besides the possibility, if not probability, that a good deal of his first production has perished, he had laid upon him the burden of shaping and perfecting the vehicle he employed. Milton, again, did not produce his epic till late in life. But in his early years he had manifested his possession of poetic power of the highest grade. There is indeed every reason to believe that 'Paradise

Lost' would have been an even nobler work than it is, had it been written at a period of life when the fervor and fire of youth had not yet been impaired by age but merely strengthened and tempered by the judgment of maturer years. Dryden is, in fact, the only great modern poet whose first production gave little or no assurance of the position he was afterwards to attain; but Dryden is more a poet of the intellect than of the feelings. Far the largest share of great verse in English literature has been produced before its creators have reached the middle period of man's allotted life on earth.

To this general rule of the excellence of early production by a great poet, Tennyson, as will be seen, is no exception, even if he be considered an exception to the decay which ordinarily follows it.

CHAPTER II

POEMS BY TWO BROTHERS

It was while the children were carrying on their studies at home, reading in a desultory fashion but on an extensive scale, that two of them—Charles and Alfred—during the years immediately preceding their entrance into Cambridge University, prepared a volume for the press. It was entitled 'Poems by Two Brothers.' When the book came out, the elder of the two was nineteen years old, the younger a little less than eighteen.

It was in the latter part of April, 1827, that this work made its appearance. It was published by a firm of provincial booksellers, J. and J. Jackson of Louth, who were the owners of the copyright. On the title-page, however, the name of the London publishing house of W. Simpkin and R. Marshall took precedence. The book was prefaced by a so-called advertisement stating that the pieces which composed it had been written "from the ages of fifteen to eighteen, not conjointly, but individually." It was further added, somewhat modestly, though boyishly, that if the work were subjected to "the microscopic eye of periodical criticism," a long list of inaccuracies and imitations would doubtless result as an outcome of the investigation. But the authors went on to say, as did Byron in

the preface to his 'Hours of Idleness,' that they had passed the Rubicon and must necessarily encounter whatever fate the future had in store. In truth, this advertisement was manifestly inspired by Byron's preface to his first venture, though it is a little more than a dozen lines, while his extended to some pages. The spirit, however, was exactly the same; the thought was the same, so far as it could be under the varying conditions. There can be no reasonable doubt that the author of the later brief preface had in his mind, while writing it, the earlier preface to the somewhat similar collection of boyish verses.

The original volume is now one of the scarcest of books. It commands accordingly an exceptionally high price whenever a copy appears on the market. The poems contained in it are precisely one hundred and three in number. This number, however, includes one written by Charles, which serves as a kind of introduction to the whole work. The manuscript of the volume was later unearthed at the printing-office, and a reproduction of the original was brought out in 1893. In this reprint the initials of the writers were attached to the different pieces, so far as that could then be determined with reasonable certainty. Here it may be said that the designation of the authorship then made, agreed pretty generally with what had previously been reached by competent critics on the ground of internal evidence. In the reprint the authorship of forty-eight of the pieces was assigned to Charles Tennyson; that of forty-two to Alfred. The rest were in most instances left undetermined. Three, however, bore

the signature of the eldest brother, Frederick Tennyson. In the preface to the book, the number of his contributions is said to be four. Accordingly one of them seems to have been left unindicated. The longest poem in the whole volume—'The Oak of the North'—was of his composition. Nor is either one of the two others specified as his distinguished by brevity. In consequence of his participation in it, the book might fairly have been termed 'Poems by Three Brothers.'

The later celebrity of Tennyson has caused an exceptional degree of curiosity to spring up about this petty volume. There are indeed circumstances connected with its publication which invest it with peculiar interest, entirely dissociated from the matter it contains. Though the boys fancied they had been crossing a Rubicon, the audacity of the act did not awaken any surprise or astonishment in the rest of the world. Men did not learn of it at the time. They continued much later to remain in ignorance of the fact that any Rubicon existed in Lincolnshire or that any one had crossed it. The work attracted no attention worth mentioning till late in the century. Three notices of it, however, certainly appeared. They are all more or less perfunctory. One can be found in an advertisement of it taken from 'The Sunday Mercury' of April 22, 1827. This spoke of it as "a work, which, under the most retiring title contains many exquisite pieces of verse." Another criticism appeared in 'The Literary Chronicle and Weekly Review' of May 19 of this same year. This was one of several weeklies fated soon to die,

or to be merged with others, which about that time were set on foot. The criticism is interesting as expressing no opinion in a genial way. "This little volume," it said, "exhibits a pleasing union of kindred tastes, and contains several little pieces of considerable merit." It quoted two poems in full. One of them was the piece beginning with the line 'Yon star of eve, so soft and clear,' and the other entitled 'God's Denunciations against Pharaoh-Hophra.' The first of these is thought by some to be the unindicated fourth poem of Frederick Tennyson.

The fullest and most genuinely cordial of these three notices was that contained in 'The Gentleman's Magazine."[1] It began with controverting the dictum of Dr. Johnson that no book was ever spared out of tenderness to its author. "Why," it continued, "to such a volume as this should a test be applied which should have reference only to high pretensions? These poems are full of amiable feelings, expressed for the most part with elegance and correctness—are we to complain that they want the deep feeling of a Byron, the polished grace of Moore, or the perfect mastery of human passions which distinguishes Crabbe? We would rather express our surprise and admiration that at an age when the larger class of mankind have barely reached the elements of thought, so much of good feeling, united to the poetical expression of it, should be found in two members of the same family. The volume is a graceful addition to our domestic poetry, and does credit to the juvenile Adelphi."

[1] Vol. XCVII, Supplement to Part I, p. 609.

It was of course not to be expected that the work should attract even so much as the little attention it received. A volume of poems written by two boys whose names were not given on the title-page, and brought out by provincial booksellers in a small country town, did not have any favoring adventitious circumstances to contribute to its success. The collection of pieces, though in a certain way remarkable, is not so very remarkable. Nor indeed is it so very unusual. Better work has been accomplished at this early age by poets who have turned out distinctly inferior to the greater of the two brothers. What has justly been regarded as the most wonderful thing about the volume is that not only were these young writers able to find men who were willing to print and publish it at their own expense but to pay in addition twenty pounds for the copyright. To the boys themselves who never had at best more than a few pence in their pockets and usually nothing at all, the possession of so much money must have given them the feeling of having come into the possession of a veritable Golconda. A goodly part of this sum, to be sure, was taken out in books. But the fact itself is justly regarded as one of the most astounding stories that can be told of the relations which have existed between authors and publishers. A prosaic explanation of this apparently inexplicable phenomenon has been given on the ground that the maternal grandfather of the two authors had been vicar of Louth. They themselves had also been students in the grammar school of the place. Accordingly, though the grandfather

had been dead long before, the interest of his personality would still continue to linger about the efforts of his grandsons.

This explanation has been called very rational. All wonder therefore is to cease. If so, the rational intellect works very differently in Lincolnshire from what it does in the rest of the civilized world. In the latter it takes more than the sale of a work among a large circle of personal friends to repay the expense of production, even when the author has achieved some reputation already. The likelihood that it would have any effect of that sort in the circle which continued to remember a grandfather with a different name, who had been dead for several years, can hardly be reckoned as justifying an experienced man of business in embarking upon any such venture. There may have been motives which influenced the Jacksons in the course they adopted which we have no means of ascertaining. If it were, however, a business transaction purely, their generosity can be praised only at the expense of their sagacity. It is doubtful—it is perhaps right to add, it is not doubtful—that the receipts from the sale never paid them even for the price of the copyright, to say nothing of the other expenses of the publication. Fortunate it pretty surely was for the boys that they fell into the hands of provincial booksellers. Had their first venture been with a London publisher, instead of receiving from him twenty pounds for the copyright, they would have been likely to have paid him instead more than twenty pounds for bringing out the book at all. Even then he would

probably have lost money by the bargain. At any rate, he would have insisted that he had, which so far as they were concerned would have amounted to the same thing.

The contents of the volume now come up for consideration. Like the work of most young and precocious writers belonging to the educated class, it was characterized by the display of that multifarious learning, in the exhibition of which boyhood delights. This was scattered over its pages with a lavish hand in the shape of mottoes, footnotes, and quotations. For most of these Alfred was responsible. Furthermore, like the work of all young writers, it reflected the authors who were their favorites. In their case it reflected the work of a great many authors, for the two brothers had been omnivorous readers, and readers, almost without exception, of the best literature. Especially was this true of the younger. Curious is the picture which the citations and remarks contained in the volume present of the tastes and occupations of the boys in that secluded Lincolnshire home. It is worth while indeed to give a fairly full, though not complete, list of the various authors with whom they were more or less familiar; for it is manifest that the references and quotations are usually suggested by their own reading and not drawn from compendiums and conventional collections of "elegant extracts." As was to be expected, the classic writers were strongly in evidence. Yet in Greek but two of these—Xenophon and Apollonius Rhodius—are referred to directly, though in the poems themselves familiarity with others

is manifested. In Latin, however, there is a far larger display of authors and titles. They come too from both early and late periods of the literature. Lucretius, Terence, Sallust, Cicero, Horace, Virgil, Ovid, Tacitus, Suetonius, Juvenal, Martial, Ælius Lampridius, and Claudian are the names of those to whom direct reference is made or indebtedness professed. Even the Latin poems of Gray are drawn upon.

In the modern tongues there is the same wealth of boyish erudition displayed. France furnishes quotations from Racine and Rousseau. Even Spanish authors are cited. But naturally the English writers present the most formidable array of names. Among the poets are found Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Young, Mason, Beattie, Cowper, Ossian, Scott, Moore, and Byron. Among the prose writers are Addison, Burke, and Mrs. Radcliffe. The historians are represented by Hume and Gibbon. There are quotations from less distinguished names which need not be considered here. The works of the great oriental scholar, Sir William Jones, are, however, worth mentioning, because they seem to have been specially favored by the younger brother. But besides direct references, it is easy to detect in the poems themselves imitations of writers who are not specifically mentioned. It is a common remark that in this volume the influence of Byron is predominant. At the time the book came out, that result might surely have been anticipated; for in the minds of most Byron still continued to be the predominating force in English poetry. Within certain bounds, accordingly, it may be conceded that

the statement is true. There is in the production of the younger brother a manifest imitation of particular poems of that author whose recent death had deepened the impression created by his brilliant career. This fact is especially noticeable in the case of certain contemplative pieces about the future life; and we may feel confident that the expedition of Nadir Shah into Hindostan would never have been written by Alfred Tennyson, had not the Assyrian previously come down like the wolf on the fold. But even here the influence of Byron is not exclusive. There are lines in the poem plainly reminiscent of the 'Lochiel's Warning' of Campbell.

More marked, however, than the character of the subjects and the form of versification is the spirit which pervades several of these imitations. Especially is it noticeable in those written by the elder brother. In Byron the posing for effect which now strikes us as so unreal had something of a basis in genuine feeling on his part, or at any rate, in what he believed to be genuine feeling. But with his imitators the posing was the only thing that was genuine at all. In the case of these two writers it had about it under the circumstances almost an air of the comic. It is perhaps natural for a boy to write gloomy poetry; to pretend to be blasé before he has really known what pleasure is; to complain of blighted affections before he could have learned by experience the meaning of that preliminary process of acquiring them which we term falling in love; to find the grave casting its gloomy shadow over life at the very age when life is abound-

ing and fairly exultant in freshness and vigor. It seems for some reason to be always natural; at that particular period Byron had made it fashionable.

But in the case of these young authors the unreality of this attitude is peculiarly unreal. The man of the world can hardly be expected to refrain from smiling when a boy of sixteen or seventeen begins to talk about the flowers of youth as having faded in spite of sorrow's tears. He might feel justified in laughing when a well-brought up lad, still a good way from having reached the end of his teens—whose greatest iniquity is likely to have been the twisting of a knocker from a door or ringing a bell and running away—when so mild a scapegrace as this should announce in all seriousness that it is a fearful thing for him to glance back over the gloom of misspent years and to have his mind filled with a thousand terrors as he sees advancing the shadowy forms of guilt, and the vices of his life stand portrayed before him without a gleam of hope to cheer his old and aching eyes. This is pretty strong language for a veteran sinner; but it is hopelessly out of place in the mouth of a boy who had never dreamed of committing a crime of even respectable turpitude, still less of perpetrating a deed of flagrant atrocity. It may be said that this is merely a dramatic picture. The writer accordingly is not to be held responsible for the views his characters express. But even in the case of these supposed characters the language has an air of unreality. The impression produced is that of feelings which no man had ever experienced in any form, and which these boys could never have conceived

of, unless influenced by an imagination inspired by vague recollections of what they had read.

But as has been intimated, this kind of writing characterizes the work of the elder brother rather than that of the younger. Throughout, this difference between the nature of their respective contributions had been recognized by the writers themselves. In their so-called advertisement they intimate that their productions are not alike either in style or matter. This is apparent to even the casual reader. The difference between the poetry of the two authors extends not merely to the treatment of their subjects, but to the subjects themselves. This the very titles show. Persia, Mexico, The Fall of Jerusalem, Mithridates, Berenice, Antony and Cleopatra are the themes upon which the younger brother dilates. These are not the sort of subjects which interested Charles. Equally marked is the difference in the manner of their treatment. In that respect the productions of the two are as divergent as two streams forming a junction, which have come from entirely different regions and carry with them the traces of different soils. Charles had none of the intricate variations of verse or peculiarities of diction which, even at that early age, had begun to characterize the workmanship of his younger brother. His writing is usually simple, clear, and with an almost fatal tendency to the commonplace. Certain of his poems, in truth, such as 'Sunday Mobs' and 'Phrenology,' are hopelessly prosaic. The influence of Byron was far more disastrously potent in his case than in that of Alfred. It is in his poems that the

posing attitude is prominent. It is he who is racked by remorse for crimes never committed. It is he who looks back upon a career of blighted hopes and sinful deeds. One of his pieces is entitled 'In Early Youth I Lost my Sire.' As a result of this misfortune, he tells us, his soul had been torn by every blast of vice. By such lines as the following he not only harrows our feelings, but proceeds to enhance the extent of his misfortune by using italics:

> Why lowers my brow, dost thou enquire?
> Why burns mine eye with feverish fire?
> With hatred now, and now with ire?
> *In early youth I lost my sire.*

As a matter of fact, we know that the Tennysons at this time had not lost their sire. Further, as a matter of theory, we are pretty safe in asserting that in minds ordinarily constituted no direful results of the kind here denoted follow from the loss of one's sire which would not have followed had the sire continued to exist.

But it is to be said that in the pieces of Alfred Tennyson which here most distinctively indicate the features of his future poetry, there is even at this early day comparatively little trace of the influence of Byron. What there is of it, if not that of Byron at his best, is certainly not that of him at his worst. In several of the more important pieces which the younger brother contributed to this volume, the influence of the earlier poet can hardly be detected at all. Fully as noticeable, certainly, are the imitations, conscious or unconscious,

of Scott and Campbell. Perhaps even more directly marked than any others are the passages that owe their existence to the poetry of Gray. There are lines which are obviously inspired by some of those contained in that writer's two Pindaric odes—inspired not in the sense of being borrowed but in that of being suggested. In truth, the wide reading of the younger brother comes out distinctly in his verse as contrasted with the little display of it by the elder, even if the latter had been as remarkable for its possession as his associate. The difference between the two in this particular is another easy method of distinguishing the authorship of the respective pieces. But in truth, he who had become thoroughly steeped in Tennyson's later diction and method of expression would never experience much difficulty in designating a very large proportion of the pieces in this volume for which he was responsible. In these first writings of the poet occur not unfrequently the compound adjectives which later much distressed the critics of his early work. Even here are to be found such expressions, for example, as *vapor-mantled, earth-imbedded, soul-enchanting,* and *greenly-tangled.* In them, too, was exhibited that fondness for the archaic which led Tennyson later to revive words and phrases which had gone out of use, and for which he came constantly to be charged with affectation. Especially noticeable in the work of a writer, then only a young boy, is the use of the prefix *y* to the past participle. From all vagaries of this sort—if we choose to call them vagaries—his brother Charles was thoroughly free.

Though the younger brother's poems were fewer in number than those of the elder, as a consequence of the greater length of his pieces, he contributed to the joint volume much the larger proportion of lines. But as may be inferred from what has been said, far more did he surpass him in quality of verse. There has been a disposition to sneer at the work accomplished in his boyhood by the future poet. Tennyson himself was at one time disposed to depreciate it. He called it his "early rot." But when towards the close of his life he came to examine it, he admitted that it was better than he had thought. It has been no infrequent statement on the part of others—usually indeed of those who have not prejudiced their minds by reading this volume—that what appeared in it gives no promise whatever of his later achievement. The assertion indeed has sometimes been made by those who have professed to pay special attention to the work itself. We have been told in an article on the bibliography of Tennyson that "we may safely assert that the most intense student of the Laureate might read this volume through without the faintest suspicion of its alleged authorship."[1] In one sense this might be said of the early production of any great author. The art, what there is of it, of boys whose ages range anywhere between sixteen and twenty, is fairly sure to be imitative. It is not in such pieces that we expect to see any striking mastery of technique or display of profound thought or intense feeling, and above all of those characteristics which mark peculiarly the expression of

[1] 'Fortnightly Review,' Vol. II, p. 386.

the mature man as contrasted with the imitation consciously or unconsciously practised by the immature. It may be remarked, however, that the suspicion of a very intense student of Tennyson might be aroused by finding an occasional line in the early poems essentially reproduced in his later works.

This fact, however, carries but little weight when we come to discuss the nature and value of the poetry. The thorough commonplaceness of Tennyson's work in this volume has been insisted upon by men who can hardly plead, who at least ought not to plead, that impartiality of judgment which arises from ignorance. So acute a critic as the late Andrew Lang took the ground in one of his essays that the early work of great poets is never better than that of ordinary men—a thesis pretty difficult to maintain in the face of certain writers, such, for example, as some of Cowley's pieces written in boyhood, or Milton's 'Nativity Ode,' or Pope's 'Essay on Criticism.' To sustain his view he cited among others the case of Tennyson. "There is no promise at all," he wrote, "in the Tennysons' 'Poems by Two Brothers.'"[1] This is negative disparagement; but for positive failure to exhibit the least sign of literary judgment we can have recourse to another critic. Of the 'Poems by Two Brothers' Stopford Brooke tells us that "they are without a trace of originality, force, or freshness—faded imitations of previous poets, chiefly of Byron; or, where not imitative, full of the futile modesty of boyhood,

[1] On 'Genius in Children,' in 'North American Review,' January, 1897, Vol. CLXIV, p. 36.

which would fain be vain but does not dare; made up partly of bold noise and partly of sentimentality, accurately true to the type of English poetry between the death of Shelley and the publication of the Tennyson volume of 1830." It is further remarked that "it is one of the literary puzzles of the world that certain great poets, as, for example, Shelley, and here Tennyson, write trash in their boyhood; and within a year or two step on to a level of original power."[1] Examples such as these show that in the production of foolish criticism no limitations are imposed by age.

This is not to say that Tennyson's productions in the 'Poems by Two Brothers' are to be regarded as highly remarkable. It would be an assumption not justified by the character of the pieces found in this volume to maintain that they gave certain indication of the advent of a great poetic genius. Had not the promise here disclosed been followed by great performance, these poems would have remained in the oblivion into which they speedily fell; or rather into the oblivion into which they were born, outside of the immediate circle of friends or relatives who were probably their sole readers. But to say that there is no promise at all shows either ignorance of their content or a wilful closing of the eyes to the fact. There are several of the younger poet's pieces which are far from being poor productions in themselves. "I did not expect to find them so good as they really are," said Frederick Tennyson in the passage of a letter

[1] 'Tennyson, His Art and Relation to Modern Life,' by Stopford Augustus Brooke, 1894, p. 55.

quoted in the reprint of 1893. His praise seems to have been given to all of them; that it has sufficient warrant in the case of Alfred may be shown by a few extracts. The first consists of two stanzas taken from a poem entitled 'The Vale of Bones.' It is the picture of a valley between mountains strewn with the bones of those who had fallen in battle:

I knew them all—a gallant band,
The glory of their native land,
And on each lordly brow elate
Sate valour and contempt of fate,
Fierceness of youth, and scorn of foe,
And pride to render blow for blow.
In the strong war's tumultuous crash,
How darkly did their keen eyes flash!
How fearlessly each arm was rais'd!
How dazzlingly each broad-sword blaz'd!
Though now the dreary night-breeze moans
Above them in this Vale of Bones.

What lapse of time shall sweep away
The memory of that gallant day,
When on to battle proudly going,
Your plumage to the wild winds blowing,
Your tartans far behind ye flowing,
Your pennons rais'd, your clarions sounding,
Fiercely your steeds beneath ye bounding,
Ye mix'd the strife of warring foes
In fiery shock and deadly close?
What stampings in the madd'ning strife,
What thrusts, what stabs, with brand and knife,
What desp'rate strokes for death or life,
Were there! What cries, what thrilling groans,
Re-echo'd thro' the Vale of Bones!

No one can well deny the force or fire of this passage, when we take into account that it comes from a boy of sixteen or seventeen. It assuredly indicated the possible, though of course not certain, development of poetic power of no mean order. This promise is brought out more unmistakably in the following stanza from the poem entitled 'Antony to Cleopatra':

> Then when the shriekings of the dying
> Were heard along the wave,
> Soul of my soul! I saw thee flying;
> I follow'd thee, to save.
> The thunders of the brazen prows
> O'er Actium's ocean rung;
> Fame's garland faded from my brows,
> Her wreath away I flung.
> I sought, I saw, I heard but thee;
> For what to love was victory?

Of an entirely different cast from either of these is the poem entitled 'Persia.' In it is depicted the grief of the founder of the empire could he have foreseen its fall. In so doing the writer describes in the following lines the extent of the domain whose fate he bewails:

> To view the setting of that star,
> Which beam'd so gorgeously and far
> O'er Anatolia and the fane
> Of Belus, and Caïster's plain,
> And Sardis, and the glittering sands
> Of bright Pactolus, and the lands
> Where Crœsus held his rich domain:
> On fair Diarbeck's land of spice,
> Adiabene's plains of rice,

Where down th' Euphrates, swift and strong,
The shield-like kuphars bound along;
And sad Cunaxa's field, where, mixing
With host to adverse host oppos'd,
'Mid clashing shield and spear transfixing,
The rival brothers sternly clos'd.
And further east, where, broadly roll'd,
Old Indus pours his stream of gold;
And there where, tumbling deep and hoarse,
Blue Ganga leaves her vaccine source;
Loveliest of all the lovely streams
That meet immortal Titan's beams,
And smile upon their fruitful way
Beneath his golden orient ray:
And southward to Cilicia's shore,
Where Cydnus meets the billows' roar,
And where the Syrian gates divide
The meeting realms on either side;
E'en to the land of Nile, whose crops
Bloom rich beneath his bounteous swell,
To hot Syene's wondrous well,
Nigh to the long-liv'd Æthiops.
And northward far to Trebizonde,
Renoun'd for kings of chivalry,
Near where old Hyssus, from the strand,
Disgorges in the Euxine sea—
The Euxine, falsely nam'd, which whelms
The mariner in the heaving tide,
To high Sinope's distant realms,
Whence cynics rail'd at human pride.

These lines are not merely remarkable for the mastery of historical and geographical detail they exhibit but for the skill manifested in marshalling an almost Miltonic wealth of nomenclature. It is easy to pick out

flaws; but a boy of sixteen or seventeen who had come into the possession of the knowledge here displayed, and had the ability to couch it in such vivid verse, has achieved something of a distinctly higher grade than ordinary and even excellent versifiers could produce at a mature age.[1] It would be no difficult matter to add other extracts as significant. These are enough, however, to show that the undeveloped Tennyson is already indicated. There is in them distinct poetic promise, though one may be perfectly willing to concede that there has been much poetic promise in the world fully equal to it which has never ripened into performance.

It may be well to give some further information about this volume, though this concerns bibliography rather than literary history. The manuscript of the poems chanced to be saved from the destruction which usually overtakes the writings of unknown authors after their works have once gone to the press. On December 23, 1892, it was sold in London by auction.[2] It brought the sum of £480. Included in the sale, however, was a copy of the printed volume, then commanding the price of about thirty pounds in the market, and also the receipt for the twenty pounds paid by the Jacksons for the copyright. The manuscript itself was sold a few months later to an American firm for £420.[3] In this country it remained for a while, but before it was disposed of here, it was re-

[1] "This is not perfect poetry," says Dr. Van Dyke (in 'The Poetry of Tennyson'), after quoting this passage from this poem; "but it is certainly strong verse. It is glorified nomenclature. Milton himself need not have blushed to acknowledge it."

[2] 'Athenæum,' December 31, 1892, p. 922.

[3] 'Notes and Queries,' June 3, 1893, p. 426.

turned to England and found a proper resting-place in the library of Trinity College, Cambridge.[1] Examination of the manuscript showed that all its contents had for some reason not been published. To the reprint of the original edition made in 1893, four short poems were added which had been omitted from the first edition.

It is not a matter of particular consequence, but it is proper to remark in passing that this volume of the two brothers has not unfrequently been spoken of in recent times as belonging to the year 1826 instead of 1827. A statement to that effect has been made, for instance, in some biographies of the poet. In other works a sort of compromise has been arranged between the actual and the supposed fact by designating the volume as that of 1826-1827. For the error Tennyson himself was originally responsible. Strictly speaking, a writer ought to know better than any one else just when a book of his own came out. Rarely is it the case, however, that he can be trusted implicitly. Least of all is it true when he has produced a long succession of works. In this instance assuredly the author cannot be trusted. The truth is that Tennyson came to confound in later life the circumstances connected with the dating of his second independent volume of poetry with those of the volume which he had brought out in conjunction with his brother. The former appeared early in December, 1832. It was postdated, however, 1833. Lapse of time with its unfailing concomitant of a treacherous memory led the

[1] *Ibid.*, September 9, 1893, p. 218.

poet to transfer to the earlier work what was true of the later. The 'Poems by Two Brothers' came out in April, 1827. The so-called advertisement prefixed bears the date of the preceding March. 'The London Daily Chronicle' of April 27, announces it as that day published. It is advertised in 'The Literary Gazette' of April 21 and April 28, though it does not appear in its list of new books until the number for May 12. This is sufficient evidence, though more could be easily supplied.

CHAPTER III

UNIVERSITY LIFE

It was about ten months after their poetical venture that Charles and Alfred Tennyson went to Cambridge University. Both were matriculated at Trinity College. To be exact, the date was February 20, 1828. There they had been preceded by their eldest brother Frederick. He had gone up from Eton where he had distinguished himself as a most successful writer of Greek and Latin verse. At Cambridge he had already made a still further reputation for himself by gaining the university medal for the best Greek poem.

With most persons poetically inclined a little mathematics goes a long way, and Cambridge had then long been and still continued to be the most mathematical of universities. Excellence in that subject was essential to the attainment of the highest honors. Yet never has it fallen to the lot of any institution of learning—at least in English-speaking lands—to have on its rolls so large a number of illustrious men of letters, most of whom knew little of that special subject and some of whom hated it. From this most mathematical of universities had been graduated before Tennyson was born a large majority of the greatest poets of England. In literature, there was to be no falling off in the period which immediately followed.

In the course of the third decade of the nineteenth century, particularly, appeared at the university a most remarkable body of men. In the early part of it Macaulay was graduated. During his first residence he expressed his feelings about the studies pursued in a letter to his mother signed "your most miserable and mathematical son." In the middle of this same decade Bulwer and Winthrop Mackworth Praed were prominent; and a little later Frederick Denison Maurice, John Sterling, and shortly after them, Charles Buller. But towards its end came together in the university, and, as it chanced, mainly in a single one of its colleges, a group of men each of whom was to achieve more or less distinction in the period which was to follow. Two of them have attained eminence for all time; but every one of the others has played no inconspicuous part in the intellectual life of the nineteenth century.

The two greatest never completed the course. Tennyson remained but three years, Thackeray but one. Yet there were several others then congregated there who were destined to be of note and force in their generation. Two of the now less known to the public of the circle of which the poet became a member were the future preacher, William Henry Brookfield, whom Thackeray described as Frank Whitestock in 'The Curate's Walk'; and the future barrister and journalist, George Stovin Venables, upon whose character—not upon whose career—the same novelist is generally asserted to have modelled the Warrington of 'Pendennis.' However that may be, he has the dis-

tinction of having contributed one cautionary line to 'The Princess."[1] Another one of the number was Kinglake, not so likely to be remembered hereafter by his history of the Crimean War, weighted down with infinite information on the pettiest topics, as by that brilliant book of travels, the glory of which is that it gives no information at all. Both Thackeray and Kinglake belonged to Trinity; but with neither of them at that time could Tennyson's acquaintance have been more than nominal, if it even existed. Nor did he then consort with FitzGerald, with whom later his relations were to become specially intimate. Furthermore, it was not till the close of his stay that he met Trench, the future archbishop of Dublin. To his more immediate circle of associates, besides the two already mentioned, belonged Henry Alford, the future dean of Canterbury; Charles Merivale, the future historian of the Roman Empire; James Spedding, the future editor of Bacon; Richard Monckton Milnes, the future Lord Houghton; and last, though so far as the poet is concerned, of greatest importance, Arthur Henry Hallam.

It is clear that at the outset there was much in his surroundings which was little to the poet's taste. The high position accorded to mathematics in the course of study would not be likely to recommend either the institution or those seeking its honors to the regard of

[1] This was the second line of the speech of 'The Princess' at the beginning of Canto IV:

> There sinks the nebulous star we call the Sun,
> If that hypothesis of theirs be sound.

one who was devoted above all things else to literature. A letter written to an aunt early in his university career reveals his dissatisfied state of mind. "I know not how it is," he says, "but I feel isolated here in the midst of society. The country is disgustingly level, the revelry of the place so monotonous, the studies of the university so uninteresting, so much matter of fact. None but dry-headed, calculating, angular little gentlemen can take much delight in them."[1] Fortunately these feelings did not continue. Still it is evident that while Tennyson was in his way an earnest student, it was not in the way which led to college honors. His acquaintance, however, was not confined to the dry-headed, calculating, angular little gentlemen of whom he seemed at first to think the university was made up. These adjectives would be especially inapplicable to the group of young men already mentioned with whom he became intimate, all of whom were profoundly affected by the feelings of literary and political unrest which were then dominant everywhere.

For the Tennysons came up to Cambridge and continued to remain there during the period of excitement and agitation which was then prevailing over England and the Continent. While it lasted not only were kings dynastic and literary sent into exile, but thrones of every kind were to a greater or less extent shaken. More than its sister university, Cambridge felt stirring in itself the intellectual revolt which sought to dethrone the old divinities and to substitute for them new gods. Two men, in particular, both con-

[1] 'Memoir,' Vol. I, p. 34.

nected with the educational staff of Trinity College, were regarded as the prophetic interpreters of the new creed. One was Julius Charles Hare, who was classical lecturer from 1822 to 1832. The other was Connop Thirlwall, the future historian and bishop of St. David's. At the time of Tennyson's residence these two were engaged in the translation of Niebuhr's 'History of Rome.' This work was then regarded by many as of a revolutionary character and as having a tendency to promote skepticism. Of the two, Hare had much the more influence with the members of the younger set in whose brains were fermenting the new literary and social ideas which were in the air. With many of them he was on terms of intimacy. As he was by nature extravagant both in his likes and dislikes, he was fairly sure to be found an ardent friend or a furious foe. One result of this temperament was that he was little able to form a trustworthy estimate of the comparative value of persons or productions. An incidental remark of his made in all sincerity furnishes a striking illustration of this critical waywardness. In 1832 he was at Munich. There he saw Schelling. That philosopher, he added, "now that Goethe and Niebuhr are gone, is without a rival the first man of the age,—I know not who is the second."[1] It is not necessary to quarrel with this estimate of Schelling. It was not an unnatural view for a metaphysician to take. It is the junction of Goethe and Niebuhr that is noteworthy.

The influence of Hare was potent with the little

1 'Memorials of a Quiet Life,' Vol. I, p. 458.

group of friends who surrounded Tennyson. The students who were under his sway frequently did more than imbibe his views; they carried them further, and sometimes carried them into action. Byron for more than a dozen years had dominated the realm of poetry. To him all aspirants for fame had bent the knee. The supremacy of this autocrat these revolutionists now proceeded to assail. Hare in particular had early become one of the most thoroughgoing advocates of Wordsworth. He had upheld his supremacy at a time when many were disposed to deny him poetical merit at all. Along with his passionate admiration of the poet was mingled an unqualified contempt for the intellectual qualities of those who had of him an opinion different from his own. It sometimes manifested itself characteristically. In November, 1829, a debate took place at the Cambridge Union on the comparative merits of Byron and Wordsworth. The friends of the latter poet were largely outnumbered. There were but twenty-three votes in his favor. This number Hare declared to be altogether too large. There were not, he said, twenty-three persons in the room who were worthy to be Wordsworthians.

It was into a society of this sort, stirred by the revolt then going on in literature and life, that the Tennysons were thrown. They were warmly welcomed. Little as the volume of 'Poems by Two Brothers' had been read or circulated, its existence could not have been unknown to the small circle of which they had become members. Their reputation had preceded them. In that boyish world it could

hardly fail to give a certain dignity to the newcomers that they could look back already upon a past of authorship. From incontestable evidence we know that in these college days poetical fame was predicted for both the brothers, though even then the superiority was generally accorded to the younger. Charles Merivale's father had been a friend of George Clayton Tennyson in their own university days. In October, 1826, he wrote to his son, advising him to seek the acquaintance of the son of his old fellow student.[1] The person meant was Frederick. But in April, 1828, about three months after the arrival of the other brothers, Merivale wrote to his father about meeting not the one who had been recommended to him, but the younger of the two new arrivals. "I have got," he said, "the third of the Tennysons in my room, who is an immense poet, as indeed are all the tribe—was the father so?"[2] This is but one of many indications of the opinion entertained in the university as to the respective merits of the three and of the superiority generally accorded to Alfred. He was the only one of them selected to become a member of a distinctly exclusive society, which both then and later played an important, though in some ways a designedly inconspicuous part in the intellectual life of Cambridge University. As indirectly it had a good deal to do with the growth of Tennyson's reputation, some account of it is desirable.

1 'Autobiography and Letters of Charles Merivale, Dean of Ely,' Oxford, 1898, p. 130.
2 *Ibid.*, p. 136.

The title of the organization was the Conversazione Society. By that it was officially known. But as its number was ordinarily limited to twelve, the term Apostles was given to it in derision. As is not unusual in such cases, the nickname was accepted, by those to whom it was applied, as a title of honor. Were they not commissioned to preach to the sons of men dwelling in outer darkness new truths in regard to literature and religion, the cultivation of a loftier philosophy, a purer poetry, higher ideals in life and letters? The society was made up of undergraduates or of those who, having taken the degree of bachelor of arts, were still continuing to pursue their studies at the university. They were consequently young men who were brought together by common sympathies, common tastes, common aspirations. Their minds were bubbling over with the new ideas with which the age was fermenting. They were disposed to scrutinize with severity, or rather to treat with contempt, the views generally held by the large majority of men, even of educated men, in regard to books and authors. All the fine audacities of youth in speculation, all its intense partisanship in matters of literature were represented by members of this organization who had the most abiding confidence in the correctness of their opinions on any subject or on all subjects. "The world is one great thought, and I am thinking it" was the way in which one of their number—John Mitchell Kemble—indicated their state of mind.[1] Joined with this was a lofty scorn of the intellectual capacities of

[1] 'Autobiography and Letters of Charles Merivale,' p. 99.

those who did not share in their opinions and beliefs. The term Philistine had not yet been imported from Germany to designate the members of the shop-keeping class who cared nothing for high ideals in life or literature. Still less had the word come to be perverted to stigmatize those whose views chanced to differ from one's own. But though the designation was absent, the spirit which had generated it was present and active. For the characterization of the degraded beings who had not attained their own lofty level, they borrowed another word from the German. They designated them as *Stumpfs*—that is, "stupids."

Along with this poor opinion of the men of their own university who did not sympathize with their views was an even more contemptuous estimate of all who had, in their opinion, the misfortune to belong to the sister university. For them they professed unmeasured contempt. This feeling seems to have been pretty general in the Apostolic band. They based their justification for this state of mind upon the long line of illustrious men of which Cambridge had been the mother, though not always regarded by these sons as the cherishing mother; and the comparative barrenness in this particular of Oxford. Especially was this true of those who had attained distinction in verse. Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Pope had received no university training; but of the other poets of the first class Spenser, Milton, Dryden, Gray, Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Byron were all graduates of Cambridge. Besides these, there too had been educated no small number of authors of inferior grade, such, for

instance, as Herrick, Herbert, Waller, Suckling, Crashaw, and Cowley. In consequence of this preponderance of eminent writers a sense of intellectual superiority came to prevail in those days and more than once made amusing exhibition of itself. It lasted indeed in members of the Apostolic band and their associates long after the period had arrived for outgrowing this particular form of folly. In December, 1840, Brookfield wrote to his wife about one of the undergraduates of the sister institution. "I found him very oxford," he said,—"which I can't for the life of me help spelling with a little o—and indeed I utterly despair of ever seeing a half-penny worth of vigorous and apprehensive mind from that precious school of gentility, and I never speak to one of her graceful children without thinking of Venables' . . . modest remark—'I often wonder what we have done to deserve being gifted as we are so much above those cursed idiotic oxford brutes.' "[1] In a later letter he commented on the unconscious good faith with which Venables had given utterance to this opinion. "His mind," he said, "not in the least engaged with the *fact* of Cambridge superiority—which was far too matter-of-course a thing to dwell upon—but solely with speculation upon the cause . . . I believe that Oxford *minds* are not considered to have any value but such as arises (as in Turnspit dogs) from their extreme rarity."

Such was the sort of spirit that prevailed among the members of this so-called Apostolic band. The birth-

[1] 'Mrs. Brookfield and her Circle,' Vol. I, pp. 59-60.

place of the organization had been St. John's College. Thriving after a fashion for a while in its original home, it gravitated at length to Trinity, where it began an altogether new life. Frederick Denison Maurice, who had entered that college in 1823, is credited with being its second founder. "The effect," wrote Arthur Hallam to Gladstone in 1830, "which he"—that is, Maurice—"has produced on the minds of many at Cambridge by the single creation of that Society of the Apostles (for the spirit, though not the form, was created by him) is far greater than I can dare to calculate, and will be felt, both directly and indirectly, in the age that is upon us."[1] It is manifest from this and various similar expressions by others that the members of the organization had no poor opinion of themselves. It was their intention and expectation to uplift and regenerate society. Their mission, said one of their number, was to enlighten mankind upon things spiritual and intellectual. They possessed, too, in its fulness, that preliminary to all success in shaking the world, an absolute confidence in their ability to shake it. Necessarily they had a set of idols to whom they bowed down reverentially. Coleridge was their principal divinity in metaphysics, Wordsworth in poetry. The reign of the latter was not wholly absolute. In it Shelley and Keats were coming to have a recognized position. It was by the men of this little band that the 'Adonais,' the monody of the former on the death of the latter, printed at Pisa in 1821, was first reprinted in England in 1829.

[1] 'Life of Frederick Denison Maurice,' Vol. I, p. 110.

About this society hung all that air of mystery which constitutes a peculiar charm of itself to those who are in the period of intellectual immaturity. Reticence in regard to it was carried to the extremest extreme. It cared not to flaunt itself in the light of day. It exhibited no visible symbols of its possession of a being. It sought secrecy, at that time at least, not to inspire curiosity or interest, but for the sake of secrecy itself. Its very existence was a matter of deduction; it could not be said to be positively known. So far were its members from being desirous of priding themselves upon their connection with it, they labored to conceal the fact that they belonged to it. Your most intimate friend might be one of the sacred band; but you did not know it, you merely inferred it. You observed that he was familiar with celebrities no longer in residence and no longer having any direct relations to the university. You saw that on Saturday evenings he was always engaged somewhere, though you had no means of ascertaining where. The silence which guarded the existence of the organization was never broken by him in the days of his active membership.

To this society Arthur Hallam and Tennyson were elected on January 24, 1830. The conviction of Alfred's superiority to his two brothers is evinced by this choice of him as one of the Apostles. He seems to have been hardly a faithful member. In the account of this organization given by Leslie Stephen he represents that according to his brother's report—which may have come down by tradition—Tennyson "had to

leave the Society because he was too lazy to write an essay.'"[1] Whatever may be the truth as to the reason assigned, there seems little doubt that he failed to respond, when it became his duty to produce one at the appointed time. It was not likely, however, to have been from laziness. The failure was in all probability due to his constitutional shyness or to dissatisfaction with what he had prepared. Whatever was the real reason for cutting short, if the tradition be true, his direct connection with the society, his hold upon its members was not in the least degree impaired either at the time or afterward. He received indeed from his associates then in the organization and from their successors what came to be powerful support in the most trying days of his career.

There can indeed be no doubt as to the profound personal impression made by Tennyson upon the brilliant group of his college contemporaries. The evidence to this effect is abundant in quantity and pronounced in its positiveness. Long before he had accomplished anything which could with propriety be termed great, he was so considered and so styled by no small number of the circle to which he belonged. Whether the prophecy of his future fame was due to a far-sighted prescience begot of the deep insight which springs from intimate personal acquaintance, or whether it was merely the enthusiastic devotion of friendship which was for once justified in its faith by the conformity of later fact, certain it is that the belief

1 'The Life of Sir James Fitzjames Stephen,' by his brother Leslie Stephen, 1895, p. 100.

that he was to be one of the leading poets of the century, if not its leading poet, was not only firmly held at Cambridge University but was loudly proclaimed, much to the wrath, as will be seen later, of professional critics who resented any attempt to force upon their approval reputations which had not received from themselves their first certificate of merit.

Illustrations of this conviction of Tennyson's greatness abound during the whole of his university career. Especially was this true after the publication of his first volume of verse, while he was still an undergraduate. "My brother John," wrote Fanny Kemble in the recollections of her girlhood, "gave me the first copy of his poems I ever possessed."[1] It was accompanied with a prophecy of his future fame and excellence written on the flyleaf. The brother did not confine his predictions to his sister. On April 1, 1830, he wrote to Trench about both Charles and Alfred. He declared them to be "of the highest class." "In Alfred's mind," he continued, "the materials of the very greatest works are heaped in an abundance which is almost confusion. Charles has just published a volume of superb sonnets; and his brother and Hallam are about to edit their poems conjointly. One day these men will be great indeed."[2] Similarly in January of this year Blakesley, who died as dean of Lincoln, wrote from Cambridge to the same man of the accession of Hallam and Tennyson to the ranks of the Apostles. "The Society," he said, "has received a great addition

[1] 'Records of a Girlhood,' 1879, p. 184.
[2] 'Letters and Memorials of Archbishop Trench,' 1888, Vol. I, p. 59.

in Hallam and in Alfred Tennyson, the author of the last prize poem, 'Timbuctoo' (of which Landor, whom I dare say, you will see at Rome, will give you an account)—truly one of the mighty of the earth. You will be delighted with him when you see him.'"[1]

This early extravagant advocacy of Tennyson's claims, and the early proclamation of his greatness by his friends were attended by a result which could have been predicted beforehand. The enthusiasm displayed by them in his behalf, if it did not actually retard the growth of his reputation, certainly did not advance it. Their ardent and undiscriminating eulogy provoked disparaging and contemptuous criticism. However painful this may have been at the time to the subject of it, it is not improbable that it contributed more to the development of his powers and to the chastening of his style than the atmosphere of unmixed laudation in which his first efforts made their appearance in the circle of which he formed a part.

But in that college circle everything was at that time favorable. While still a student at the university he produced the piece to which reference was made by Blakesley. On Saturday, June 6, 1829, the Chancellor's gold medal for the best English poem by a resident undergraduate was adjudged to Alfred Tennyson. He had not been a willing contestant for the prize he secured. It was at his father's wish that he competed. The subject given was Timbuctoo. Accordingly he furbished up an old poem entitled 'The Battle of Armageddon,' to do duty in celebrating a city of

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 50.

which he and every one else knew nothing—a city accordingly which imagination could endow with stately palaces, fair gardens, argent streets, pagodas, obelisks, minarets, and towers, even though reason whispered that these visionary objects would in reality shrink into a settlement of huts low-built and mud-walled. The poem itself consisted of about two hundred and fifty lines. The distinguishing peculiarity of it was that it was written in blank verse; for the revolutionary spirit that was then in the air extended even to poetical composition. Hallam's competing production, too, was in *terza rima*. Both the measures chosen outraged all academical tradition; for from the beginning the rhymed heroic verse had been consecrated to prize poetry. Of the unsuccessful contestants we know the names of Arthur Henry Hallam, of Richard Monckton Milnes, and of George Stovin Venables. Doubtless there were several others. The piece itself was printed the same year in the 'Prolusiones Academicæ.' It was later reprinted several times, though not until a comparatively recent period has it been included in the editions of the poet's works.

No satisfactory reason has ever yet been furnished for the subjects chosen for prize poems. These are usually as wonderful as the verse to which they give birth. We have seen that the one named for 1829 was Timbuctoo. To most men the selection will now appear absolutely incomprehensible. Why of all the places in the world this city on the southern verge of the Sahara Desert with its affluence of mud houses and its penury of palaces should have been picked out as

the subject of a prize poem will be explained by them as due to that inscrutable providence which seems to have designed that the character of the topics to be treated in this sort of literature should be adapted to the character of the literature itself.

At the same time there were then some special reasons which were of weight in dictating the choice. Attention had for many years been directed to that portion of the dark continent in which lay this city. To the civilized world it was known only by report. There was something of the same desire to reach it as there has been to see Mecca; but it was at that particular time much more intense and widespread. Interest, too, had long been aroused in the equally mysterious river near which it stood. To find either the source or mouth of the Niger and to trace its course had been before the period under consideration, and long after continued to be, one of the baffling problems of African exploration. But during the decade from 1820 to 1830 special interest had been awakened in the city itself. It had flourished for centuries, it had been the seat of successive kingdoms and the prize of contending nations; yet it was now hid in an obscurity which no efforts seemed able to dissipate. Neither its character nor its extent was known, not even its precise situation. Vague dreams of its magnificence floated in the imaginations of some, with pretty confident belief in its meanness on the part of others. Everything was possibly existent in a place which no European eyes had ever beheld. Mungo Park had passed by its port in 1805. In 1826 Major Laing had

reached it and sojourned in it for some weeks; but on his return he fell a victim to the jealousy which had long guarded the secret of the city's situation and character. Perishing in the desert his papers never saw the light. In 1828 the Frenchman, René Caillié, visited it and remained in it fourteen days. So at least he said, though his account, now admitted to be true, was at the time received with suspicion, if not with positive incredulity. Naturally, therefore, about the city itself still remained an atmosphere of mystery and of consequent curiosity. That is pretty clearly the reason why Timbuctoo was selected as the subject.

When Pendennis asks Warrington, who had told him he was a poet, whether it was his 'Ariadne in Naxos' or his Prize Poem on which he based his favorable opinion, that kindly but rough critic is represented as yelling out to his inquiring friend this genial outburst: "Of all the miserable, weak rubbish I ever tried, 'Ariadne in Naxos' is the most mawkish and disgusting." "The Prize Poem," he continued, "is so pompous and feeble that I'm positively surprised, sir, it didn't get the medal." This somewhat pronounced criticism is unfortunately sustained by the character of many and perhaps most of the poems which have attained this distinction. Still, several of them have been the work of men who subsequently acquired more or less poetic reputation—such as Heber, Bulwer, Milman, Macaulay, Praed, and Matthew Arnold. Yet the common view is justified by the literary quality of these pieces. As a general rule there is only one sort of poem which is fuller of sus-

tained and imposing tediousness than a prize poem: and that is a competing poem which has not taken the prize. Nor can it well be maintained, as it seems to me, that the 'Timbuctoo' of Tennyson varies materially from the estimate implied in the words which Thackeray puts in the mouth of Warrington. Indeed, Tennyson's own opinion seems not to have differed from this. Sometime during the decade from 1830 to 1840—his son is inclined to put it as perhaps about 1831—a letter was sent the poet by a printer who asked leave to include 'Timbuctoo' in a collection of prize poems. Tennyson gave to the application a somewhat reluctant assent. He took care at the same time to indicate his opinion of works of this nature. "Prize poems," he wrote, "(without any exception even in favour of Mr. Milman's 'Belvidere') are not properly speaking 'Poems' at all, and ought to be forgotten as soon as recited. I could have wished that poor 'Timbuctoo' might have been suffered to slide quietly off, with all its errors, into forgetfulness."

Nor was this merely the feeling of the moment. About the middle of the century he expressed the same sentiment to a subsequent gainer of the prize who had also written his poem in blank verse. "I could wish that it had never been written," he said of his own production.[1] Still whatever may have been the poet's own estimate of his work, there is no doubt as to the opinion entertained of it in the little circle to which he belonged. The enthusiasm of his admirers found at once vociferous vent. 'Timbuctoo' was hailed

[1] F. W. Farrar's 'Men I have Known,' 1897, p. 20.

as a masterpiece of genius. On the strength of the excellence displayed in it, prophetic anticipations of the future greatness of its author were loudly proclaimed. There was little hesitation, little restraint in the language of the band of admirers who surrounded the young poet. Two of the competitors for the prize expressed their admiration in extravagant terms. In a letter dated September 14, 1829, Hallam wrote about 'Timbuctoo' to his friend Gladstone, then a student at Oxford. In this he gave utterance to the following bit of prophecy inspired by the poem. "The splendid imaginative power that pervades it," he wrote, "will be seen through all hindrances. I consider Tennyson as promising fair to be the greatest poet of our generation, perhaps of our century."[1] A little later Milnes bore similar testimony. "Tennyson's poem has made quite a sensation," he wrote to his father in the latter part of October. "It is certainly equal to most parts of Milton."

These extravagant words express, to be sure, the opinion of boys still under age, and of boys furthermore who had been unsuccessful competitors for the prize; and if one is beaten in a poetical contest, it is certainly more creditable to be beaten by the equal of Milton or by the greatest poet of the century than by some one destined to be a nameless nonentity. Yet almost as high praise came from another and entirely disinterested quarter. Charles Wordsworth, the future bishop of St. Andrews, was an Oxford man. There is no ground for supposing him to have had a

[1] 'Memoir,' Vol. I, p. 46.

personal acquaintance with Tennyson. Yet he thought 'Timbuctoo' "a wonderful production," though he admitted that if such a piece had been sent up at Oxford, its author, instead of receiving the prize, would have been more likely to have been rusticated with the view of his passing a few months at a lunatic asylum. Still, he added, "if it had come out with Lord Byron's name, it would have been thought as fine as anything he ever wrote." This was as ridiculous a remark as anything that Tennyson's Cambridge friends had said. It is, however, fair to take into account that the production of a poem as fine as anything Byron ever wrote would not have been deemed by the utterer extravagant praise, if it came from a member of the Wordsworth family.

Such opinions, absurd as they now strike us, reflected with some accuracy the prevalent sentiment of the coterie which had gathered about the young poet. It found indeed published expression in a critical periodical which was then in the beginning of a long and yet unended career. Early in January, 1828, 'The Athenæum' had been set on foot by James Silk Buckingham, an inveterate founder of periodicals. For the first few years after its creation, it maintained a somewhat precarious existence. It early passed into the hands of Frederick Denison Maurice. He in 1829 resigned the editorship to John Sterling, though he continued to contribute to its columns. Both these graduates of the university were connected by the closest ties with the younger body of men who made up the Cambridge set to which Tennyson belonged. In

August, 1828, Trench wrote to Kemble that Maurice and "that gallant band of Platonico-Wordsworthian-Coleridgean-anti-Utilitarians" were at the helm of 'The Athenæum' with undivided sway. In the following month he informed the same correspondent that this periodical was written entirely by Apostles.

Naturally no hostile criticism would come from such a quarter. But what was hardly to be expected, highly favorable criticism came instead. It is something unusual for prize poems to receive the notice of reviewers. It was the connection of the then editors of 'The Athenæum' with the members of the Apostolic band that led to the exception which was made in this particular case. In July, 1829, appeared in that periodical a highly eulogistic notice of 'Timbuctoo.' Included in the article was an extract from the poem itself to the extent of fifty lines. "We have accustomed ourselves," said the critic, "to think, perhaps without any good reason, that poetry was likely to perish among us for a considerable period, after the great generation of poets which is now passing away. The age seems determined to contradict us, and that in the most decided manner: for it has put forth poetry by a young man, and that where we should least expect it—namely, in a prize poem. These productions have often been ingenious and elegant, but we have never before seen one of them which indicates really first-rate poetical genius, and which would have done honor to any man that ever wrote. Such, we do not hesitate to affirm, is the little work before us; and the examiners seem to have felt it like

ourselves, for they have assigned the prize to its author, tho' the measure in which he writes has never before, we believe, been thus selected for honor." Then, after quoting the passage from lines 62 to 112 the reviewer solemnly added: "How many men who have lived for a century could equal this?"

Of course it is idle to pretend that this is an outside impartial estimate of the production. It is equally idle to celebrate its courage and foresight, now that later achievement has shown that this particular poet has realized the anticipations of his early admirers. For 'Timbuctoo' was in no sense whatever a great poem. There are fine lines in it and even fine passages. Still, none of them belong to poetry of the highest order. Had not Tennyson written many things far better, his name would scarcely be heard of now, if heard of at all. It was not his fault that what appeared in the poem could hardly be said to have the slightest connection with the place which did duty for its title. Nobody knew anything about Timbuctoo. Accordingly it was excusable for the poet not to say anything about it, though he was careful to drag in its name. It was consequently inevitable that there should be in it an indefiniteness which verged closely upon the incomprehensible. In fact, this was the view taken at the time in Cambridge itself. Even the enthusiastic Hallam, who saw in the production the promise of the greatest poet of the century, declared that the examiners by striking out the prose argument, which the author had prefixed to the piece, had done all in their power to verify the concluding words,

"All was dark," which he quoted, however, as "All was night."

Naturally a poem which depended for its comprehensibility upon a prose argument prefixed, cannot strictly be deemed entitled to the praise of clearness. In truth, several years after—in 1836—appeared in the then rowdy, rollicking monthly, 'Fraser's Magazine,' an article in the shape of a letter from Cambridge, purporting to give the philosophy of the art of plucking. It was followed by another article in the number for July which pretended to give pluck examination papers.[1] In the first of the two the Chancellor's medal was disrespectfully designated as the annual medal for the discouragement of English poetry. In the second there was a series of questions in a critical examination paper. One was to this effect: "What is Professor Smythe's opinion of the Nebulous and Incomprehensible in Poetry? Illustrate your explanation by extracts from Tennyson's *Timbuctoo.*"

In truth, 'Timbuctoo,' after Tennyson had founded a school of his own, might have been produced by a score of his best imitators without exciting any particular remark. It would certainly in such a case have had no result of producing a prediction that a new great poet had arisen. Still, it is easy now to underrate the piece as it was then to exalt it. There was a certain just foundation for the admiration that was felt and the enthusiasm that was displayed. For 'Timbuctoo' was a poem written in a distinctly new style. It was no echo of any writer that had preceded.

[1] Vol. XIV, p. 117.

That it was produced under the influence of several different ones has been pointed out by the critical perspicacity of men who agree on the fact of imitation though not on the person imitated. One or two indeed have been selected for his model whom at that time Tennyson had not even read. It is not an uncommon thing to hear it said that in this poem the influence of Shelley is plainly discernible. Were anything specially due to that author it would be the vague haze pervading it, which at times renders it no easy matter to make out the writer's drift, through the mist of words in which it is enveloped. Still, Tennyson was undoubtedly capable of being obscure on his own account and did not need to resort to Shelley for assistance in that particular. Necessarily every young writer is influenced by poets of the past. But just as in his boyish lines in his first production in the volume brought out in conjunction with his brother, whatever of those which were distinctly best was purely his own, so it was in 'Timbuctoo.' A new and original poet had come who was to introduce into our literature a method of expression conspicuously different from what had gone before. His admirers recognized it and felt it from the first. They were impressed by its novelty, they were led to celebrate it unduly before its fulness and force had been developed. In consequence, they gave it the credit of possessing a beauty and power which was indicated but not yet attained.

This fact enables us to understand the fervor of praise with which many of Tennyson's early pieces were received which strike us now as being possessed

of but ordinary merit. It was a new force in literature which was manifesting itself. The men who admired it welcomed it with an enthusiasm which they could not have felt later when it had become familiar to every one. On the contrary, the followers of the old school looked upon it askance or displayed absolute indifference. They either refused to read it at all, or read it only for the sake of vituperating it. In these opposite points of view and the states of mind engendered by them lay the tardy recognition which waited upon Tennyson's first efforts and the hold he acquired and retained when acceptance of his work had at last become general. The change of attitude on the part of the public was indicated by him later in the poem entitled 'The Flower.' Tennyson emphatically denied that in this piece he had made any allusion to himself personally or to his own fortunes. He called it "an universal apologue and parable." To a writer who had sent him a volume of essays he remarked that "you have fallen into a not uncommon error with respect to my little fable 'The Flower', as if 'I' in the poem meant A. T. and 'the flower' my own verses."

It is just to accept this disclaimer by Tennyson of any intended allusion to his own personality. It was a universal truth which he had made prominent in his apologue. Still, it is evident a natural, perhaps the natural interpretation of the lines, was that it was a reference to his own fortunes. This little piece appeared originally in the volume entitled 'Enoch Arden, etc.,' which came out in 1864. For nearly a

score of years Tennyson had been recognized as standing at the head of living English poets. A crowd of imitators had sprung up in every quarter. They had made his style and method of expression familiar. The inevitable reaction from this excessive popularity had already begun to show its face, though it was not till the following decade that it ventured to display its hostility openly. The poet's peculiarities of diction had not only been commented upon, but they had been imitated and reproduced until the queasy taste of the public was beginning to show manifest signs of having become weary of what it had previously cherished. The seed which he had sown had produced the flower which was first called a weed. It had few admirers and many vituperators. Then all had been changed. Everybody praised the flower. Everybody procured the seed. Soon its commonness began to make men tired of it and once more led them to term it a weed. For the seed sown in unsatisfactory soil could not produce the perfect flower; but it could produce something which looked like it, which suggested it, which bore to it, in fact, so close a resemblance that it tended to impress itself as the genuine article upon that large number whose literary perception was not sufficiently keen to detect the presence of that incommunicable something that not merely distinguishes genius from mediocrity but genius from poetic talent of a high order. The reader was reminded of Tennyson; but because of the lack of that subtle something which cannot well be described or defined, he did not feel him as a force.

One episode there was in Tennyson's career at the university which had little to do with prize poetry or college honors. During the summer of 1830 he made with Hallam a foot-journey across France to the Pyrenees. The trip was undertaken in behalf of the Spanish revolutionists. Readers of Carlyle's 'Life of John Sterling' will remember the account given in it of the exiled general Torrijos, and the tragic fate which overtook him and his little band of followers when he set out upon his hopeless expedition into the south of Spain. Only incidental mention is made of the young Englishmen who cast in their lot with the conspirators. Sympathy had been strongly excited at Cambridge with the aims of the patriots seeking to free liberty bound hand and foot in their native land. Especially did this exist in the Apostolic band, as its members had now begun to designate themselves. With these the influence of Sterling was then predominant. He himself was engaged heart and soul in the cause of the Spanish liberalists. The project appealed strongly indeed to men of ardent natures fired with the zeal of youth which often leads them to rush on hopeless enterprises, and sometimes enables them to accomplish apparent impossibilities, under the divine impulse of the belief that what ought to be is to be. Two men engaged in this expedition there were who found themselves waiting at Gibraltar for an opportunity to make a descent upon Spain and raise there the standard of constitutional liberty. Fortunately for them, the opportunity was not allowed to present itself. Finding nothing to do, or rather

that nothing could be done, they returned to England. In consequence, they were saved from having any share in the later tragic end of the enterprise. These two men were John Mitchell Kemble and Richard Chenevix Trench. Considering the nature of their respective careers in life, their participation in this enterprise creates a mild surprise in the modern reader.

Some of the Spaniards engaged in this revolutionary undertaking were, however, on the borders of France. It was to these conspirators that Hallam and Tennyson went. To them they bore money and letters written in invisible ink. Early in July the two Cambridge students set out to make the journey and to spend in this novel way a part of their long vacation. They accomplished their mission safely. Tennyson, however, was not altogether favorably impressed with the views of some of the revolutionists he met. To Hallam and him, one of them, so far as his imperfect utterance would permit, confided his intention to cut the throats of all the priests. He apologized for the difficulty he experienced in expressing in an unknown tongue various aspirations of this character. He added, however, in French, "But you know my heart." "And a pretty black one it is," was the comment Tennyson made to himself.[1] In a letter sent from Cambridge in December of this year Hallam gave to Trench an account of this trip. "Alfred went, as you know, with me," wrote he, "to the south of France,

[1] Mrs. Ritchie's 'Recollections of Tennyson, Ruskin and Browning,' 1892, p. 23.

and a wild, bustling time we had of it. I played my part as conspirator in a small way, and made friends with two or three gallant men, who have been since trying their luck with Valdez.'' There are two references in Tennyson's published verse to this passage in his life. One is in the seventy-first poem in 'In Memoriam.' There he speaks of

> The Past
> In which we went thro' summer France.

Again he refers to this trip in the little piece, first published in 1864, which is entitled 'In the Valley of Cauteretz.' In that he speaks of having walked here two and thirty years before with one that he loved. It is characteristic of the demon of accuracy which took possession of Tennyson in his later life that he became much vexed with himself for having written two and thirty years instead of one and thirty; as if any one besides himself would know the precise time when the poem was written. The very year of his death he wished to alter it, and was only persuaded to let it stand because it was the reading with which the public had become familiar. Accuracy of the sort just indicated is of highest importance in a work dealing with the facts of history or biography. In a work of the imagination it is of the slightest earthly consequence.

The return journey was not made on foot. On the eighth of September, the two adventurers took passage at Bordeaux on the steamer 'Leeds' which was sailing for Dublin. Before he went on this journey, however,

Tennyson had made an appeal to the public in a volume of verse. With it his distinctively literary career may be said to have begun. The work appeared in the early part of that period of transition which was going on in the world of politics and letters. Accordingly, before we can make ourselves really acquainted with the career of the man who was to become the representative voice of his generation or can understand the influences which operated to hasten or retard his reception by the general public, we must get, in the first place, a clear conception of the literary situation as it existed at the time of Tennyson's appearance as an author; and in the second place, a general knowledge of the writers who were occupying the attention of the public for the years which followed that appearance. Even more important at this point is it to make a survey of the critical literature of the time and of the influence it wielded. This latter indeed is of particular consequence because of the poet's abnormal sensitiveness to criticism and the peculiar influence it exerted upon his course of action. In any account of his career it therefore naturally takes precedence.

CHAPTER IV

THE LITERARY SITUATION IN THE TRANSITION PERIOD

Part One

Critical Literature of the Period

Readers of 'Pilgrim's Progress' will remember that Christian, when he came to the end of the Valley of the Shadow of Death, saw lying there the blood, bones, ashes, and mangled bodies of men who had traversed that road formerly. These were the remains of those who in old time had been cruelly put to death by two giants dwelling in a cave near at hand. Their names were Pope and Pagan. Pagan, he found, had been dead many a day; and Pope, though still alive, had grown so old and crazy and stiff in his joints, that he could do little more than sit in the mouth of his habitation and grin at the pilgrims as they went by, and bite his nails because he could not come at them.

This description of the part taken by the two giants, so far as it is a portrayal of Puritan feeling, is a not untrue picture of the position which according to the belief of large numbers was held by the 'Edinburgh' and 'Quarterly' reviews during the first third of the last century. The opinion, then quietly but widely

accepted, and sometimes expressed, was that these periodicals, if they could not bring good fortune to those they favored, could bring misfortune and ruin to those they attacked. If for any cause a work failed, which they chanced to notice unfavorably, the result was not attributed by the author to any defect in the work itself, but wholly to the hostile criticism which it had received from one or both of these powerful organs. This was especially true of the 'Edinburgh'; more specially true of it when it reigned without a rival from its commencement in 1802 to 1809, the year in which the 'Quarterly' was set on foot. Even after that time, little limit seems to have been assigned to its power to elevate or depress. Naturally, according to the scale of the particular approval or censure found in its columns, its editor Jeffrey was correspondingly adored or hated.

The days are gone by so completely that it can hardly be said that they are remembered, when these two great quarterlies were mighty powers both in the world of literature and of politics. The conditions which then gave them their influence have now disappeared. It is hardly possible for us even to conceive such a state of things existing as is indicated in a letter written from London by Lockhart to William Blackwood towards the end of January, 1830. He tells his correspondent that in consequence of an article in the last 'Quarterly,' stocks had fallen two per cent. This the Master of the Mint had told the Duke of Wellington. Thereupon the Dictator, as Lockhart terms the Duke, had sent for Croker and Barrow

to the Cabinet Council and rowed them. They in turn sent for Murray and rowed him. Then the publisher took his turn and came and rowed Lockhart. "God knows how this may end," he concluded,—"I care not."[1] The information given by the author himself of the effect which was wrought by the 'Quarterly' article may have been exaggerated; but it is manifest that in the eyes of the writer it would seem in no wise surprising to his correspondent.

Great as was the influence wielded by these two periodicals in politics, it was even greater in literature. It is rarely the case now that anything they say raises even as much as a ripple on the current of contemporary criticism. One indeed would not wish even in these days to be treated disrespectfully by a 'Quarterly' reviewer; still one would not be likely to lose much sleep over it. Only under peculiar conditions does its most unfavorable notice have marked effect upon the fortunes of the work attacked. Accordingly, in spite of our acquaintance with the ovine nature of man in the matter of literary judgments, we wonder that the educated class of any period could allow their opinions to be manufactured for them by these self-constituted arbiters. Yet this they unquestionably did then. It was done, too, on the grandest scale. Exceptions took place only when the verdicts pronounced ran counter to the feelings or prejudices of the reader or came in conflict with his superior knowledge. But in the criticism passed upon little-known authors this was rarely the case. Hence the decisions

[1] 'William Blackwood and his Sons,' by Mrs. Oliphant, Vol. I, p. 246.

announced by these periodicals were usually accepted without hesitation by the public.

It is fair to say that the possession of this influence was to a large extent honestly earned. There is no question that efforts were put forth by the quarterlies to secure the ablest and best-informed writers. Hence on many topics they spoke with an authority that could not well be gainsaid. On points where knowledge and scholarship were involved, the conclusions they came to were apt to be right. This was not always the case. Certain most woeful blunders have to be charged to their credit, or rather discredit. Still, it was so generally; for learning, unlike genius, is something that can be tested, can be weighed in the balance. Its value can therefore be exactly ascertained and clearly stated. The only exception is when some one happens to come along who is vastly better informed upon a particular subject than any one else. It becomes then a matter of chance whether he shall be deified by those who know less than he or denounced by those who ignorantly fancy that they know more.

It is further to be kept in mind that for a long time the quarterlies had the field of higher literary criticism practically to themselves. They had come to be the only organs which possessed authority recognized by the general public. For more than half a century preceding their existence there had been periodicals which had paid particular attention to book-reviewing. To that indeed some of the original ones had been exclusively devoted. These were the two which bore the names of the 'Monthly' and the 'Critical'; for

previous publications, such as the 'Works of the Learned,' were in many ways of an entirely distinct character. The 'Monthly' began in 1749, the 'Critical' in 1756. During the last half of the eighteenth century these flourished with a vigor and repute which was but little affected by periodicals of a similar character—such, for example, as the 'London,' the 'Analytical' and the 'English Review'—which sprang up every now and then, but usually lasted only a few years. These two which had first occupied the field survived into the nineteenth century. But while they continued to retain something of an audience, the general feebleness of their contents and the particular feebleness of their conductors and contributors gradually deprived them of influence. So when the 'Edinburgh' appeared, it had almost a clear field to itself even in the department of literature, though this was but a portion of the ground it set out to cover. The 'Critical' gave up the ghost after a number of years. The 'Monthly,' however, continued to exist after a fashion down to nearly the middle of the nineteenth century. But during the latter portion of its career it never had much effect upon public opinion.

Nor was the influence of the two great quarterlies seriously affected by the several other ventures in the same field, which were either in existence when they themselves came into being or sprang up from time to time afterward. These were usually, though not invariably, monthlies. Some of them, like 'The Anti-Jacobin Review,' were the organs of parties. Hence their literary criticism was always more or less influ-

enced by political considerations. A similar statement can be made of periodicals of another kind, such, for example, as 'The British Critic' and 'The Eclectic Review,' whose reviewers were largely under the influence of sectarian bodies. On that very account they appealed to a limited class. Besides these there were a number of quarterlies and monthlies that sprang up at intervals and lasted at best but a few years. They produced no profound impression in any quarter. A fair specimen of these was 'The British Review,' which was begun in 1811 and lasted till 1825. This was somewhat disrespectfully described by Lord Byron as "my grandmother's review": a by no means inappropriate title, if we are to judge it by the character of its contents. Naturally, none of these impaired the influence or diminished the circulation of the two great quarterlies. The only periodical that came to contest their supremacy was 'The Westminster Review,' the organ of the philosophical radicals; but this was much later. It did not make its appearance until 1824.

The first of the real agencies that came to displace the quarterlies from the position of influence in current criticism which they held during the first third of the nineteenth century was the monthly magazine. The magazine itself had sprung into existence in the earlier half of the eighteenth century. The ones that first appeared—and they soon came to be numerous—contained no original matter. As their name implies they were at the outset nothing but storehouses of the material in the shape of essays which the newspapers

had previously put forth or of the news which they had collected. Accordingly, they were published at the very beginning of the month following the date they bore—that is, for example, the magazine for January came out the first of February. This was a practice which did not disappear entirely till the following century. Naturally they did not at first deal with reviews of current literature. In the change which they underwent in the second half of the eighteenth century, they began to pay some attention to this subject also. But their notices of books were pretty generally meager as regards length and too often feeble as regards character. Serious work of this sort was mainly left to the two leading monthlies, already mentioned, which devoted themselves exclusively to book-reviewing. All this was changed, however, with the founding of 'Blackwood's Magazine' in April, 1817; or rather with its second founding in October of the same year.

This magazine which now came to the front was essentially different in character and conduct from those which had previously borne the name. In its new form it appealed to a far larger circle of educated readers than did the quarterlies. It dealt as did they with political and literary questions; but it mingled with its discussion of topics of current interest matter which they did not pretend to furnish, such, for illustration, as fiction and poetry. 'Blackwood's' speedily took the leadership of this class of periodicals. Owing mainly to the talent of its chief contributor who was generally assumed to be the editor, it made for itself

a conspicuous place in the field of literary criticism. From the time it passed out of the hands of its original editors, Pringle and Cleghorn, it came to be distinguished by the audacity, billingsgate, malice, wrath, and all uncharitableness which when manifested towards others than ourselves—especially towards those opposed to us in opinion—are above all things dear to the carnal heart. Combined also with its horse-play and its abusiveness, often degenerating into blackguardism, was wit of the keenest character. But more than any of these qualities, the critical ability displayed in its columns, with its generally high and cordial appreciation of what was really excellent in literature, recommended it to a class of readers who may or may not have sympathized with its political views. Furthermore, it came out with unvarying regularity, while the quarterlies were not only published at much greater intervals, but they were very apt to appear just when it suited the convenience or laziness of their editors. The date on the number of the periodical was a very untrustworthy indication of the date of its appearance. This was particularly true of the 'Quarterly' under Gifford's editorship.

'Blackwood's Magazine' set a new standard for publications of this sort. It changed very materially their character. Many of them naturally clung to the old methods; but in the path now opened imitators soon pressed in. It is only necessary here to mention 'The London Magazine' which was started in 1820 but died before the third decade of the century was completed. During its short career, however, it made for

itself a lasting reputation by publishing among other things the 'Essays of Elia' and the 'Confessions of an Opium-Eater.' Then 'The New Monthly Magazine' was reconstituted in this same year with Thomas Campbell as its editor, a position he held until 1830. Neither of these publications took the place in popular estimation occupied by 'Blackwood's.' It was not till the rise in London of a new periodical of its own political faith that its leadership was at all shaken. This was 'Fraser's Magazine' which was started in 1831 by Hugh Fraser, and Maginn, an old contributor to 'Blackwood's,' who will live forever in literature as the Captain Shandon of 'Pendennis.' At the outset, this periodical surpassed in its brutality and the grossness of its personalities its northern contemporary; but it also gathered to its support many of the very ablest men of letters flourishing already, or just beginning their career; and its columns will always have to be consulted by him who wishes to ascertain the general trend of critical opinion prevalent during the transition period among a large and influential class of contributors and readers.

But with us the magazine has largely ceased to be a vehicle of literary criticism. In those which devote any attention to it at all, it occupies generally a subordinate place; in much the largest number of periodicals of this class it occupies no place worth considering. The field it once covered is now largely taken by the weeklies and the dailies. The former was the agency which was destined ultimately to occupy, after a fashion, the place once filled by the quarterlies and

to some extent subsequently filled by the magazines. At the opening of the fourth decade, this class of periodicals was slowly making its way to the front. Early in the century there had been several attempts to establish weeklies which should be given up principally to criticism. None of these met with any permanent success. At last in 1817 the publisher Colburn started 'The Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres, Arts, Sciences, etc.' Of this William Jerdan became in the course of the same year a part proprietor and the editor. After various ups and downs it was placed on a paying basis. At the beginning of the period now under consideration, it was much the most influential of the purely literary weeklies then existing in England. Such it remained for some time afterward. This, too, in spite of the fact that its reviews were often produced more largely by the agency of the scissors than of the brains. The use of this mechanical implement perhaps contributed materially to its success; for the critical acumen of the editor was something that no intelligent man could take seriously.

The prosperity of 'The Literary Gazette' naturally led to numerous imitators. Especially during the third decade—in particular during its closing years—a number of these new competitors for popular favor sprang into being. This one fact shows clearly that it was in that direction that criticism was finding its natural avenue to expression. Against all these rivals Jerdan held his way for a while undisturbed. In the 'Noctes

Ambrosianæ' for May, 1828, Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd, is represented as saying, "Nane o' a' the new weekly periodicals wull ever cut out the Literary Gazette." "Never, James," North replies, "and simply for one reason—Mr. Jerdan is a gentleman, and is assisted by none but gentlemen." At the very time these words of Christopher North were printed, the new weekly was in existence—'The Athenæum'—which was to perform the feat he had declared impossible. But the supremacy of 'The Literary Gazette' was as yet merely threatened. Belief in its permanence and its power still continued unshaken. Henry Taylor, in commenting upon Southey's uncompromising independence, not to say defiance of criticism, wrote in 1831 to a correspondent that 'The Literary Gazette' could "do almost anything to the sale of a book"; and yet in spite of this, Southey had written an epigram upon William Jerdan, its editor, because he had attacked a volume of Charles Lamb's. It is hardly necessary to observe that no literary journal was ever able to do almost anything to the sale of a book. Undoubtedly a popular critical organ can influence favorably or unfavorably the reputation of a writer or a work for a limited time; for the majority of readers prefer to take their opinions at second hand. But the result is never permanent in any case. The help or harm that is brought or wrought by such means to the repute or sale of a book is always transitory. Still, Taylor's remark is worth noting as indicating an opinion that was then widely prevalent about

the power wielded by this particular periodical to benefit or to injure.

Another class of weeklies, which later became common, began to appear in considerable numbers about the beginning of the transition period. They were political as well as literary in their character, perhaps more distinctly political than literary. Their prototype was 'The Literary Examiner,' which had been started as far back as 1808 by the Hunts, John and James Henry Leigh. By the class to which its then unpopular liberal politics appealed this periodical was held in high favor. As might be expected, both it and its editors were made the subjects of constant vituperation in the Tory press as long as the periodical was under their management. At the beginning of the period under consideration, the control of it had fallen into the hands of Albany Fonblanque. To it came a few years later as literary and dramatic critic John Forster, the personal friend of many of the younger men of letters, notably of Robert Browning and Dickens. The junction of these two writers made the paper for a long time a powerful agent in moulding public opinion. But several periodicals of this nature, some of which were very ably conducted, began their existence a little before 1830. Of these one of the most influential was 'The Atlas.' It was founded in 1826. It had for a long time a high reputation, particularly so during the fourth and fifth decades. Testimony to the estimation in which it was held comes to us from widely different quarters. In 1839 FitzGerald, for instance, speaks of it as "the best weekly critic of

Music and all other things that I know of.'"[1] In September, 1844, Mrs. Browning describes it as the best of the newspapers for literary notices, though in the following month she modified this opinion by excepting 'The Examiner.' Of the periodicals of this class then flourishing the only survivor is 'The Spectator' which was established in 1828 and has had a long and honorable career. Particularly was this true of it after its critical columns came under the control of Richard Holt Hutton in 1859.

The critical literature of the daily papers often carries now a good deal of weight. At this time, however, it could hardly be said to exist at all. When it did appear, it was usually of little importance. It was not till the close of the fourth decade that the dailies began to give up any space worth considering to book-reviewing. Even the position of that was subordinate. Yet noted men, or men destined to become noted, were sometimes employed in this particular sort of work. Thackeray, for instance, was then an occasional contributor of such articles to the 'Times.' But development in this direction was slow. The truth is that during this period of transition a close connection with any newspaper, no matter how influential, was regarded to some extent as a social stigma. There are singular exhibitions of this state of feeling recorded in the letters and journals of the time. In 1826, for instance, Murray, largely under the inspiration of the then young Disraeli, planned a great Tory organ. It

[1] Letter of April 10, 1839. 'Letters and Literary Remains,' Vol. I, p. 48.

was a morning paper he projected which was to be called 'The Representative.' In 1826 it began its existence. After a checkered career of six months, in which it had cost the proprietor twenty-six thousand pounds, it gave up the ghost. A great effort had been made to secure Lockhart as its editor. Disraeli visited him, in behalf of the publisher, with that object in view. It gives a vivid picture of the feelings of the time that Lockhart, as well as Lockhart's father-in-law, felt it to be an impossibility for him to enter upon life in London in the capacity of a newspaper editor. It meant a descent in the social scale. The pill was sugar-coated for him, as well as it could be, by Disraeli, who grandiloquently assured him that he would come to the capital, "not to be an editor of a newspaper but the Director-General of an immense organ and at the head of a band of high-bred gentlemen and important interests."

This lofty description of his position and powers did not tempt Lockhart. He refused the offer. He refused it too on the ground that it was unsuitable to one of his station in life. By William Wright, a barrister of influence who corresponded with him on the subject, Canning is also reported to have said that Lockhart could come to London as editor of the 'Quarterly' but not as editor of a newspaper, or at least as a known or reputed editor. "I told Disraeli before he left," continued Wright, "he had a very delicate mission, and that though my rank in life was different to your own, having no relations whose feelings could be wounded by my accepting any honest employment, I

should not receive an offer of an editorship of a newspaper as a compliment to my feelings as a barrister and a gentleman, however complimentary it might be to my talents.'' To the same effect spoke Sir Walter Scott. ''It is very true,'' he wrote to Murray, ''that this department of literature may and ought to be rendered more respectable than it is at present, but I think this is a reformation more to be wished than hoped for, and should think it rash for any young man, of whatever talent, to sacrifice, nominally at least, a considerable portion of his respectability in society in hopes of being submitted as an exception to a rule which is at present pretty general. This might open the door to love of money, but it would effectually shut it against ambition.''[1] These words were written in 1825. That Scott continued to hold the same sentiments is evident from a letter to his son-in-law in 1829 with reference to a proposal that the latter should be connected with some journal which the Duke of Wellington was wishing to purchase. ''Your connection with any newspaper,'' he wrote to Lockhart, ''would be disgrace and degradation. I would rather sell gin to the poor people and poison them that way.''[2]

To us it seems a peculiar state of things that a position as the editor of a powerful daily like the 'Times' or the 'Chronicle' of those days should be reckoned as involving social degradation, while the editorship of a quarterly periodical could be taken without risking any loss of standing, if it did not even carry with it a

[1] 'Memoir of John Murray,' Vol. II, p. 197.
[2] A. Lang's 'Life and Letters of Lockhart,' Vol. II, pp. 51-52.

certain distinction. But such assuredly seems then to have been the case. There is evidence too that this state of feeling continued to exist years later. In 1835, Fanny Kemble Butler published her journal giving an account of her travels in the United States. In the course of it she mentioned a gentleman of the press who called upon her and with whom she was pleased. "He seems to think much," she added, "of having had the honor of corresponding with sundry of the small literati of London."[1] This was bad enough; but its atrocity was exceeded by a note which was appended. "Except where they have been made political tools," were its words, "newspaper writers and editors have never, I believe, been admitted into good society in England." It is little wonder that her work was reviewed with a severity to which she had previously been little accustomed. She received in profusion reminders that her own reputation was due to the very men she affected to despise.

The monthlies and the weeklies were in full activity at the beginning of the fourth decade. They were steadily sapping the influence of the two great quarterlies, but they had not seriously impaired it to outward view. They merely threatened it. True it was that the original editors to whom their success had been largely owing had disappeared from the stage of active management. Jeffrey had been succeeded by Macvey Napier, a man possibly of engaging character, but certainly of altogether less ability than his predecessor. In this respect the 'Quarterly' was more for-

1 'Journal of a Residence in America,' Paris, 1835, pp. 105-106.

tunate. Gifford, who had imparted to that periodical much of its peculiar acerbity, had retired from its editorship in 1824; he hated authors with a zeal that would have done credit to a feudal baron. Two years later he died. But the spirit in which it had been conducted continued to live in Lockhart, who after the brief sway of John Taylor Coleridge, held the reins until the spring of 1853. In consequence of his abilities and the position he held as the head of this review, he was for a long while one of the most prominent figures in the critical world, particularly so during the decade from 1830 to 1840. One result was that the influence of the 'Quarterly,' at least, if not of the 'Edinburgh,' appears to have been for a time but little diminished.

Singular illustrations of the feeling entertained about these two periodicals were manifested in quarters where we should least expect to see it. Bulwer, for instance, was the most popular of living English novelists for at least the first half of the thirties. His works, as fast as they were produced, invariably went from edition to edition. That they hit the taste of the public is manifest by their success even when they appeared anonymously. They were spoken of in terms of high praise by men who were none too lavish of their commendation. They were translated into foreign tongues. But all this did not content him. The one thing that rankled above all others in his bosom was that in neither of the two quarterlies had his name been mentioned either for praise or blame. Their failure to review his works was the one distinc-

tion without which all the others apparently were as naught. His friends complained of it, while affecting to hold it in contempt. In May, 1831, Miss Landon contributed to 'The New Monthly Magazine' an article upon the novelist. It could not have been more eulogistic, not to say fulsome, if it had been dictated to the writer by Bulwer himself. "We cannot but remark," she said in the course of it, "on the singular silence preserved toward the most rising author of their day, in the two pseudo-called great Reviews, the Edinburgh and the Quarterly." The former speedily repented of its neglect. It published a laudatory criticism of certain of Bulwer's novels in which it apologized for its delay in not having noticed them before. Not so Lockhart, nor indeed his immediate successor. No review of Bulwer's works appeared in the 'Quarterly' until 1865.

The character of Lockhart is something of a puzzle. The notices of him that have been published have very largely come from his friends, or, at all events, from friendly sources. Yet over none of the critics of this period hangs so pervasive a cloud of distrust and dislike. In the so-called Chaldee Manuscript which came out in the seventh number of 'Blackwood's Magazine,' and created at the time an unparalleled and to the modern reader a somewhat incomprehensible sensation, he was represented, doubtless by himself, as "the scorpion which delighteth to sting the faces of men." The appellation was constantly applied to him later in a way and to an extent he probably came not altogether to like. Whether justly entitled to it

or not, there clung to him something of the middle-age superstition about that insect which represented it as carrying a flattering face and a stinging tail. The comparison was not altogether appropriate. The latter characteristic might be conceded to Lockhart; but no one ever charged him with exhibiting the former. The Viper was another epithet frequently bestowed upon him. It cannot be maintained that such an appellation carries with it the idea of great personal popularity.

It is hard indeed to hit upon the exact origin of the general prejudice which seems always to have existed against Lockhart. He was undoubtedly a man of cold and reserved manner; but it seems as if he must have developed to a disproportionate degree the faculty of making himself disagreeable, to have begot indifference so universal, where it did not pass over into active dislike. A professional reviewer has naturally his enemies; but he has also his friends. Of the latter, Jeffrey had hosts. So had John Wilson. Even Gifford, the fierce and implacable, had found men to cherish towards him a lukewarm feeling which might perhaps deserve to be styled regard; and what is much harder to understand, he had found men to admire his lyric verse. But while such persons may have existed in the case of Lockhart, and doubtless did exist, and perhaps in considerable numbers, it is no easy matter to find proof of the fact. Praise is not unfrequently paid to his works. Few are the passages, however, which one comes across in the journals or correspondence of this period to indicate that he himself was

looked upon with affection by any one outside of his immediate family circle, or those with whom he shared the closest personal ties. Two bulky volumes, giving an account of his career, were brought out a few years ago by a brother Scotchman. They are avowedly of the nature of an argument for the defence. Everything in his favor that can be directly related or indirectly suggested is related or suggested. Everything which seems to bear hard upon his course is either softened or explained away, or even converted to his credit. The reader indeed after finishing the biography rises from its perusal not quite clear in his mind whether it is the life of Lockhart with which he has been concerned or with the life of one of the saints. Yet the special pleading of the work has done little or nothing towards rehabilitating the character of its subject. It seems rather to have impressed men with the justice of Dr. Johnson's dictum that a Scotchman must be a very sturdy moralist who does not love Scotland better than truth, and that he will always love it better than inquiry.

The influence of a critical article depends largely upon the repute of the periodical in which it makes its appearance. This is inevitably the case when the name of the reviewer, as usually happens, is withheld. Nothing marks more distinctly the difference between the past and the present than the incomparably greater importance once attached to the utterance of the quarterlies over those of the monthlies or over those of any other vehicle of criticism. This state of mind was indeed disappearing at the beginning of the

fourth decade of the century. In time it disappeared altogether. But it continued to prevail then. We cannot indeed understand the feelings of both authors and readers during this period of transition without a clear perception of the attitude of the public towards these two classes of periodicals. To all outward appearance the inertia of past movement was still carrying the quarterlies along. Though they had really lost the commanding position they once held, the fact escaped for some time the notice of themselves as well as that of their readers. A dozen years before, their supremacy could not have been questioned for a moment. The far higher position they occupied in comparison with other organs of criticism is brought out clearly in the difference of the effect wrought upon public opinion by two noted attacks on Keats which appeared in the representatives of these two classes of periodicals—the one in a quarterly, the other in a monthly.

In 'Blackwood's Magazine' for October, 1817, came out the first of a series of articles upon what was called The Cockney School of Poetry. It was followed by a second article in the same year, and by a third and fourth in July and August of the year following. They were all signed Z. Three of these articles were devoted to an attack upon Leigh Hunt as the chief doctor or professor of the so-called Cockney School. That author whom we are now apt to think of as a lively and amiable essayist was in the early days of the century recognized as an aggressive, trenchant, and outspoken leader-writer. He had for years aroused

the wrath of the government periodicals by the liberal principles he constantly advocated. In particular he had sent a shock through all Torydom by the reflections which he had cast both upon the character and the personal appearance of the Prince Regent. In one of the organs of the government party, the official head of the state had been plastered with the most sickening adulation. Hardly any laudatory phrases were missed in the encomiums passed upon him. Among other tributes to his perfections he had been styled "an Adonis in loveliness." The whole characterization aroused Hunt's ire. He had no hesitation in giving vent to it. This Adonis in loveliness he described as "a corpulent gentleman of fifty." He went on further to say that "this delightful, blissful, wise, pleasant, honourable, virtuous, true, and immortal Prince"—all these epithets had been applied to him in 'The Morning Post'—"was a violator of his word, a libertine over head and ears in debt and disgrace, a despiser of domestic ties, the companion of gamblers and demi-reps, a man who had just closed half a century without one single claim on the gratitude of his country or the respect of posterity."[1] Naturally this was not the sort of language to conciliate the favor of the Tory organs. From that time for years to come they let no occasion slip to attack Hunt upon every imaginable pretext.

'Blackwood's Magazine' especially distinguished itself as his assailant. In the articles just mentioned there was practically no limit to the abuse heaped upon

[1] 'The Examiner,' March 22, 1812.

this underbred person, as he was designated, this plebeian both in rank and mind as well as in station and society. But it was particularly upon the score of the immorality of his writings that attack against him was here directed. Nobody indeed can be so pure-minded as a critic when he fancies he has an opportunity to vent on this ground his dislike of an author. In particular, the volume entitled 'The Story of Rimini,' which had come out in 1816, was subjected to the most virulent denunciation. In his zeal for purity, the reviewer wrought himself up almost to a frenzy which has now a distinctly comical aspect. It was in the following chastened style that his third article began. "Our hatred and contempt of Leigh Hunt as a writer," it said, "is not so much owing to his shameless irreverence to his aged and afflicted king—to his profligate attacks on the character of his king's sons—to his low-born insolence to that aristocracy with whom he would in vain claim the alliance of one illustrious friendship—to his paid panderism to the vilest passions of that mob of which he is himself a firebrand—to the leprous crust of self-conceit with which his whole moral being is indurated—to that loathsome vulgarity which constantly clings round him like a vermined garment from St. Giles'—to that irritable temper which keeps the unhappy man, in spite even of his vanity, in a perpetual fret with himself and all the world beside, and that shews itself equally in his deadly enmities and capricious friendships,—our hatred and contempt of Leigh Hunt, we say, is not so much owing to these and other causes, as to the odious

and unnatural harlotry of his polluted muse.'"[1] This is a good illustration of the methods of criticism much in vogue in the early part of the nineteenth century in even the highest literary periodicals. Delicacy of satire, incisiveness, point, were qualities rarely displayed. Instead was a kind of personal attack, slang-whanging, vociferous, brutal. There were doubtless those who then considered it powerful criticism.

The first three numbers of the articles on the Cockney School had been devoted to Hunt, for the sake of attacking whom the whole series had evidently been undertaken. But as one man could not well be turned into a school, it was necessary to have some one else to assail. Shelley and others were under consideration; but the choice fell at last upon Keats. He was a personal friend of Hunt's, he had been praised by him, and in turn had written lines in his praise. Accordingly he was selected as the second subject of abuse. The volume of his 'Poems' which had appeared in 1817 had been followed by 'Endymion' in 1818. These two furnished the pretext for the criticism which was directed not against the works but against the man. The article[2] began with a discourse on the wide prevalence of the poetical malady which was raging uncontrolled through the land. The case of Keats in particular was distressing. "This young man," said the reviewer, "appears to have received from nature talents of an excellent, perhaps even of a superior order—talents which, devoted to the purposes of any

[1] 'Blackwood's Magazine,' Vol. III, p. 453.
[2] *Ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 519-524.

useful profession, must have rendered him a respectable, if not an eminent citizen." He then went on to observe that Keats had been destined to the career of medicine, and had been apprenticed some years before to a worthy apothecary. But all his prospects had been undone by a sudden attack of the poetical malady, though from what cause was unknown. "Whether Mr. John," he continued, "had been sent home with a diuretic or composing draught to some patient far gone in the poetical mania, we have not heard." However, the mischief was done, and of late the symptoms had been terrible. "The phrenzy of the 'Poems,' " he added, "was bad enough in its way; but it did not alarm us half so seriously as the calm, settled, imperturbable, drivelling idiocy of Endymion." The rest of the article is very much in the same style as this choice beginning. "Mr. Hunt," said the reviewer, "is a small poet, but he is a clever man. Mr. Keats is a still smaller poet, and he is only a boy of pretty abilities which he has done everything in his power to spoil." The article concluded with this piece of advice. "It is a better and a wiser thing," said the critic, "to be a starved apothecary than a starved poet; so back to your shop Mr. John, back to 'plasters, pills, and ointment boxes,' etc. But for Heaven's sake, young Sangrado, be a little more sparing of extenuatives and soporifics in your practice than you have been in your poetry."

It is safe to say that nothing more coarsely and vulgarly abusive ever appeared under the guise of criticism in what purported to be a respectable periodi-

cal. Equally is it true that nothing more insolent was ever written by a man of talent about a man of genius; for there is really little doubt of the correctness of the general opinion which then and since has ascribed the authorship of these articles to Lockhart. Where the secret has been so jealously guarded absolute proof cannot be furnished. At a later period no one could have been found anywhere eager to claim the credit of the attack on Keats. Indeed it is fair to say that even at the time itself there were those who perhaps sympathizing with the views expressed in the article had yet the grace to be ashamed of its character. Naturally the admirers of Lockhart—never a numerous body—have been anxious in later days to relieve him of the discredit of having written it. But the utmost they can say for their view is that the charge is "not proven." That indeed might be expected to be the case. Still the evidence is morally convincing. The articles signed Z. have all the characteristics of his style. The opinions expressed in them are the opinions he expressed elsewhere. As late as 1828 in his review of or rather invective against Leigh Hunt's 'Lord Byron and Some of his Contemporaries,' he remarked in referring to Keats that "our readers have probably forgotten all about '*Endymion,* a poem,' and the other works of this young man, the all but universal roar of laughter with which they were received some ten or twelve years ago."[1] He also spoke of 'Endymion' as one of a number of volumes already "sunk to the bottom of the waters of oblivion." In fact, there are

[1] 'Quarterly Review,' Vol. XXXVII, p. 416, March, 1828.

certain phrases in this review which are almost identical with those contained previously in the 'Blackwood' article. Furthermore, as will be found later, these opinions about Keats were repeated in his review of Tennyson.

It is to the credit of the sense of shame of the contributors to 'Blackwood' that those connected with the magazine never conceded the fact of any particular person being designated as the author of these scurrilous articles. They invariably denied the imputation with blushing truth or unblushing mendacity. Often they were hard put to it. Maginn, for instance, writing to William Blackwood from London in 1823 tells him of having met Croly. "I dined with him," he said, "in company with an insufferable wretch of the name of ———, who knows everything of 'Maga' that Croly knows, and who boasts of enjoying the confidence of L." By L. he meant Lockhart. "I hope," he continued, "this is impossible, for the creature conducts some unheard-of paper in London, and is one of the press gang. He told me many other things, that he knew L. to be Z., for he had it from his own lips. Surely L. could not be such a spoony."[1] Maginn lied like a good comrade. He denied flatly this assertion of the authorship, and in the lack of a more satisfactory place to put the writer, he insisted that there was reason to believe that the person who signed himself Z. was at that time in Germany.

The point, however, which concerns us here more particularly, is, that this notice of Keats in 'Black-

1 'William Blackwood and his Sons,' by Mrs. Oliphant, Vol. I, p. 397.

wood' for August, 1818, was followed the next month by a review of 'Endymion' which appeared in the thirty-seventh number of the 'Quarterly.' This number, to be sure, bears the date of April. It was, however, not actually published until towards the close of September, 'The Quarterly Review' in those days being usually as much behind the times in its date of publication as it was in its views.[1] The author of the article is conceded to have been John Wilson Croker. It consisted of but four pages. The critic began by honestly confessing that he had been unable to read 'Endymion' through. He had made efforts, he said, as superhuman as the story itself appeared to be, to finish it, but he had found it impossible to struggle beyond the first of the four books. He had the consolation, however, of knowing that he was no better acquainted with the meaning of the book through which he had painfully toiled, than with that of the three into which he had not looked. He affected to doubt that Keats was actually the name of the poet, for he could hardly believe that a man in his senses would put his real name to such a rhapsody. He did not indeed deny that the author had powers of language, rays of fancy, and gleams of genius; but he was a disciple of the new school of what had somewhere been called cockney poetry. This, he added, "may be defined to be the most incongruous ideas in the most uncouth language." As the disciple of this

[1] No. CXVII advertised as published this day in the 'London Chronicle' of September 26. It had previously been advertised as about to be published in the issue of September 23, and September 25.

new school Keats was a copyist of Leigh Hunt, but more unintelligible, almost as rugged, twice as diffuse, and ten times more tiresome and absurd than his prototype.

Though this review was contemptuous throughout, it contained nothing of the personal scurrility which disgraced the article in 'Blackwood.' On the whole, too, it was inferior to the latter in interest and power. But it shows the far higher estimate held by the quarterly over the monthly periodical that the attack in the former was far more noted then and indeed has remained so ever since. To this day it has steadily served as one of the most conspicuous stock examples to show the malignant and absurd criticism which often distinguished that periodical. At the time, it was celebrated by Byron as having caused the death of Keats. It called forth the indignant monody of Shelley on his dead friend. But while the article in the 'Quarterly' created all this sensation, the still more vituperative and much longer one in 'Blackwood' attracted but comparatively little attention from contemporaries. Nor has it excited much comment in later times. This result was not at all due to the superiority of the former. It was really determined by the respective positions in popular estimation held by the two classes of publications. The unfortunate thing for the periodicals in which the attacks upon Keats appeared, was not their brutality, nor their insolence, but the obtuseness of critical perception which characterized them, the incapacity to comprehend that a great poet had made his appear-

ance. It tends to produce gloomy views of the general banality of criticism to find two of the most noted reviewers of the time speaking of a sky-soarer like Keats as being the disciple of a twitterer of the hedges like Leigh Hunt.

It has been fashionable in these later days among men who have never read a line of his writings to talk contemptuously of Jeffrey's criticism, as if the supremacy in this particular which he acquired and maintained among the giants of the Georgian era was somehow due to fortuitous circumstances. Here is not the place to discuss his merits or demerits. But it increases immensely one's respect for his literary perspicacity to find him a little later than the appearance of the review in the 'Quarterly' declaring of 'Endymion' that with all the obscure, unnatural, and absurd passages to be found in it, he who would represent the whole poem as despicable must either have no notion of poetry or no regard for the truth. He went further and added that he did not know of any book which he would sooner employ as a test to ascertain whether any one had in him a native relish for poetry and a genuine sensibility to its intrinsic charm. Jeffrey not merely recognized the genius of Keats, but had no hesitation in proclaiming it—an easy thing to do twenty or thirty years later, but then evident to but few, and certain to meet with unqualified dissent from many and perhaps most. We know how bitterly Byron resented this particular review of 'Endymion' by Jeffrey, for he had been irritated to the depths of his soul by the contemptuous opinion

expressed by Keats of his own poetic god, Pope. His words furnish a still further illustration of the all-commanding position occupied by the periodical over which that critic presided. "Nobody," he wrote to Murray in 1820, "could be prouder of the praises of the *Edinburgh* than I was, or more alive to their censure, as I showed in *E*[*nglish*] *B*[*ards*] *and S*[*cotch*] *R*[*eviewers*]. At present *all the men* they have ever praised are degraded by that insane article." Byron did not, but both Lockhart and Croker did, live long enough to see their judgments contemptuously spurned by the cultivated public; yet it is a satisfaction to know that at the time itself their verdict was almost disdainfully set aside by him whom his contemporaries generally recognized as the supreme arbiter of poetic ability.

Any survey taken of the critical literature of any period almost inevitably leads to a depreciatory estimate of its character. Every generation has always the fullest confidence in its own judgment. It is perfectly convinced that the decisions it has reached about the merits of the authors of the past supersede all that have gone before, and will be recognized as binding by those who follow after. It therefore takes but little interest in the attitude of previous generations, save perhaps to wonder at their folly, to point out their blunders, and to indulge as a consequence in an exalted sense and patronizing display of its own superiority. It is perhaps inevitable that this feeling should prevail; certainly it will after familiarizing one's self with the opinions about the authors which

held sway during this period of transition. Were we to draw general conclusions from the specific data furnished by the literary organs of that time, we should be forced to take the ground that contemporary criticism, at least of works of the imagination, was the most untrustworthy and valueless occupation to which the human mind can devote itself. Few as were then the successes of those concerned with the production of creative literature, they far outnumber the successes of those who sat in judgment upon them. It is not that the works which are now never heard of were then eulogized in the most glowing terms, and works which the world cherishes now among its priceless possessions were either cavalierly dismissed, or inadequately noticed, or were spoken of in the most depreciatory terms. This is characteristic of every period. But the critics of that day professed that they were looking earnestly for successors to the great writers of the previous period. Yet they were unable to discover the rise of any new poetical luminaries above the horizon. The trouble with them was that they could not recognize them after they were risen. There is a curious disagreement between the conclusions reached about authors and their works by the reviewers of that time and the conclusions in regard to the same writers and writings which soon came to be held generally by cultivated readers and continue to be so held to-day. And it made no difference apparently from what quarter the criticism came. The wisest and greatest of men were often as much subject to aberration in their views, were as much

struck by judicial blindness as the obscurest and least esteemed.

Let us, however, be just to the critical fraternity of this period who shared in certain of the disadvantages of critics of all periods, besides having some special disabilities of their own. There is of course the personal equation which leads one man to look with indifference upon what the vast majority of men passionately admire. But far greater than this is the difficulty that attends him who is compelled to give speedily a fair and just judgment of a work which necessarily requires for honest appreciation that thorough familiarity which is begot of frequent examination and of examination in different states of mind. This is true of every single poem of any length. But when it comes to a collection of short poems, the task of judging becomes infinitely harder. "There is no forming a true estimate," wrote Wordsworth, "of a volume of small poems by reading them all together; one stands in the way of the other. They must either be read a few at once, or the book must remain some time by one, before a judgment can be made of the quantity of thought and feeling and imagery it contains, and what variety of moods of mind it can either impart or is suited to." This is a condition of things that must always confront the critic who has to bring out his notice at a particular time, or under the urgency of early demand. No matter how diligent and open-minded he may be, he is always heavily handicapped by the inadequacy of his opportunity to gain full appreciation of what he has

under consideration. Furthermore, in consequence of the haste and pressure under which he is constantly compelled to form and express opinions, the conscientious reviewer is inevitably haunted by the fear that his judgment may be imposed upon by something which has about it for him the attraction or repulsion of novelty, either in its matter or in the manner of its treatment. This may lead him in one case to undue disparagement; or what in his eyes is far worse, it may induce him to attribute to the work under consideration an excellence which cannot stand the test of close familiarity. The cautious critic is therefore inclined to express himself with reserve, if not with coolness, even when most favorably disposed; for he feels that while it may turn out, unfortunately as regards himself, that the primrose he fancies he has chanced to meet by the river's brim, may be a good deal more than a primrose, still in the vast majority of instances it is much safer for him to treat it as a primrose and nothing more, and not mistake it for a giant sequoia.

CHAPTER V

THE LITERARY SITUATION IN THE TRANSITION PERIOD

Part Two

Surviving Reputations of the Georgian Era

By 1830 the great Georgian era had reached its close. The force of the mighty intellectual outburst, which had lasted for a third of a century, had been spent. The men who had set it in motion or had carried it forward had largely passed away. Those of them who survived no longer poured forth inspiration. There was an interregnum, not infrequent in literary history, between the spirit that had gone out and the spirit that was to come in. The throne of letters was vacant.

The greatest of the younger race of this vanishing era had all found early graves. Keats had died at the age of twenty-five, Shelley at the age of thirty, Byron at the age of thirty-six. There were still a number alive of the mightiest of the older generation, but as a rule their creative activity had ceased. Scott was already entering the valley of the shadow of death. Coleridge was moralizing or monologizing in the Gilman villa at Highgate. Wordsworth was now

beginning to rejoice in the fulness of his fame; but his fame was based upon his early work, and was not increased, nor was it to be increased by anything he was now producing or destined to produce. Of the men of the second rank Crabbe was approaching fourscore and was incapable of further exertion. Campbell, Hunt, Landor, Moore, Rogers, and Southey were to live longer, some of them much longer; but their work was henceforth mainly confined to prose, or in most cases might better have been restricted to it when it was not.

To take the place of those who were gone, or who were still on the stage but with their work accomplished, there were no men of promise looming up. So assuredly it seemed to the critics of that time. They scanned the horizon near and far—at least they said so—in search of some new luminary; but in no quarter could they find anything to reward their wistful gaze. A feeling of this sort continued during the whole of the decade from 1830 to 1840. In truth, it largely extended down to 1850. Even before the earlier date it had manifested its existence. "Since the death of Lord Byron," wrote Jeffrey in 1828, "there has been no king in Israel; and none of his former competitors now seem inclined to push their pretensions to the vacant throne. Scott and Moore and Southey appear to have nearly renounced verse, and finally taken service with the Muses of prose;—and Crabbe and Coleridge and Wordsworth, we fear, are burnt out;—and Campbell and Rogers repose under their laurels, and, contented each with his own

elegant little domain, seem but little disposed either to extend its boundaries, or to add new provinces to their rule.''[1] At the period this was written, there could hardly have been an exacter picture of the situation.

Views to the same effect, but even gloomier, came a few years later from the leading critic of 'Blackwood's Magazine.' ''All the great schools seem effete,'' said Christopher North. . . . ''All the Sacred Band have done their best—their all—but on the horizon I see not the far-off coming light of the foreheads of a new generation of poets. That dawn will rise over our graves—perhaps not till the forlorn *'hic jacet'* on our tomb-stones is in green obliteration. The era has been glorious—that includes Cowper and Wordsworth, Burns and Byron. From what region of man's spirit shall break a new dayspring of Song? The poetry of that long era is instinct with passion—and, above all, with the love of nature. I know not from what fresh fountains the waters may now flow—nor can I imagine what hand may unlock them, and lead them on their mazy wanderings over the still beautiful flowers and herbage of the dædal earth—the world of sense and of soul. The future is all darkness.''[2]

Such was the melancholy view of the situation taken in the North. From the South came the same wail of woe. No matter whether the review reflected Whig or Tory opinions or was purely literary, a similar

[1] 'Edinburgh Review,' September, 1828, Vol. XLVIII, pp. 47-48.
[2] 'Noctes Ambrosianæ,' 'Blackwood's Magazine,' February, 1832.

doleful commentary is to be found. In 1834 'The New Monthly Magazine' assured us that the condition of literature seemed anything but progressive. "In the department of poetry," it said, "we have had nothing for several years worth mentioning. A desultory effusion now and then finds its way into the periodical journals, as if to show that the fire of genius is not as yet wholly extinct amongst us. But no poem of any length or character has lately seen the light in this country."[1] Again and again spoke to the same effect the Tory organ, 'Fraser's Magazine.' In 1834 in a review of 'The Poets of the Day,' the critic summed up briefly his estimate by declaring it to be "sad work." "We recollect," the writer went on to say, "who were they who once in our time gave us something worth reading, and we sorrowfully look for them or their like in vain. Has our poetry departed from us; and are we sunk to an age of criticism—an age which never affords anything worthy of being criticised?" "One by one," he said on another occasion, "these 'mighty masters' have fallen asleep, or ceased to touch their deep-toned lyres." The prospect was dismal. "No sun, no moon," he added, "no stars in their poetical heavens—nothing but a miserable sprinkling of wretched glow-worms." A ray of light, however, came to cheer this despondent soul. He had discovered in one of the contributors to the magazine a writer who was to redeem the period. He had written "one of the noblest poems with which modern genius has enriched our language and nation—perhaps

[1] April, 1834, Vol. XL, p. 498.

the noblest poem since the days of Milton.'"[1] This was an epic entitled 'The Judgment of the Flood.' Modern men have largely forgotten not merely the existence of this great work, but even the name of him who wrote it. Its author was John Abraham Heraud, who in course of time subsided from the position of successor to Milton in order to become a subordinate editor of a London periodical. But even a temporary ray of hope from that quarter was insufficient to alleviate the sorrows of the then leading critical weekly, 'The Literary Gazette.' Much to the wrath of its monthly contemporary, it refused to find in Heraud the coming literary regenerator of the race. Its view in consequence was altogether despondent. "We neither lack poetry," it said, "nor the taste for poetry, but we lack poets."

Let it not be fancied that these are merely scattered expressions of individual opinion laboriously extracted from the critical literature of the period. Sentiments of a precisely similar character can be found everywhere in the reviews of the day—indeed, it is safe to say in every article that dealt directly or indirectly with works which are designed to appeal to the reader for beauty of style or for expression of intense feeling. There was a universal lament that literature in its higher forms met with but slight encouragement; in poetry, its highest form, it met with none at all. Publishers were chary about bringing out volumes of verse by unknown men. They complained too that the productions of men already well and widely known

[1] Vol. IX, p. 534, May, 1834.

did not pay their expenses. "Sufficient for our day is the mediocrity thereof," said in 1832 the same critical weekly already cited. "There is no encouragement for higher efforts. Literature has become a mere traffic, and Shakespeare and Milton as a property at three and a half per cent would be rejected for Tompkins and Jenkins at four." This was the voice of the weeklies. The quarterlies were just as pronounced in their opinion. In an article on Taylor's 'Philip Van Artevelde,' 'The Edinburgh Review' characterized the time as "a period of marked indifference to poetical productions."[1] The same attitude was taken by the monthlies. "Many a well-educated man," said 'Fraser's Magazine,' "can no more read poetry than he can Chinese. The neglect, not to say contempt, of the muses, now in fashion, bids fair to render this Parnassian *illiteracy* universal."[2] These are no single utterances; they are selected from a large number which can be found scattered through the periodicals of the period. There was assuredly so much justification for the gloomy views here expressed of the literary situation that from 1830 to 1842 not a single volume of poetry which has continued to survive paid then the expenses of its publication. Ten to twenty years before the former date, verse, at least the verse of great authors, was as a rule more salable than prose. The disposition in consequence was not unnatural to dwell upon the glories of the period which had just gone by, and to contrast with them the mournful

1 'Edinburgh Review,' October, 1834.
2 'Fraser's Magazine,' December, 1834.

realities of the present. Those times are past, said as late as 1839 a writer in 'The Edinburgh Review,' "and no visible tokens seem to announce their return. Even while many of our best poets are yet alive, poetry herself is dead or entranced."[1]

It is not necessary indeed to limit this despairing sort of utterance to the period in question. It occurs in English literature at intermittent intervals. Pretty certainly it has recurred in all literature since the inscription of hieroglyphics on Egyptian monuments. Of the little estimation in which poetry was held in England at this particular time, as compared with prose, there can be however no question. It was the view taken by writers generally, whether critical or creative, during the twenty years which followed the death of Byron. The fact of the unpopularity of poetry was generally conceded; the reasons given for the fact ranged all the way from the non-existence of dictators to the levelling influences caused by the spread of democracy. Authority for all sorts of different and differing views can be found on every side. It may not be fair to cite Wordsworth, for he had not much respect for any of the poetry produced in the previous era except his own. During its most brilliant period, had it not been for himself, he would have been discouraged by the outlook. Naturally he was much more despondent in these latter days. One of his visitors observed to him in 1833 that amidst the great political agitations of the times through which they had been passing, poetry seemed to have died out

[1] Vol. LXVIII, p. 335.

entirely. Wordsworth admitted that this was true but insisted that it was not the only cause. There had been, he said, an overproduction, and in consequence a surfeit.[1]

As already intimated, many and varied were the reasons then given for the general decay of interest in poetry. A common one was the blight of democracy. This from its very nature was asserted to be deadly to literature and the arts. One of its consequences was that poetry received no longer patronage from men of rank. Another reason given was the growth of the utilitarian spirit. Still another was the wide and constantly increasing interest in novels and their consequent prevalence. But of the many different explanations constantly brought forward two stand out prominently. One is general, the other specific. There were those who attributed the conceded lack of interest in poetry to the astounding progress of scientific investigation and the wonders it had accomplished. The extraordinary physical discoveries of later years, it was asserted, by throwing further and further back the boundaries of the world of practical science, and realizing its most visionary conceptions, had rendered cheap and vulgar the wonders of the imagination. The days of romance had in consequence gone by. Nothing was to be looked forward to but the reign of utility. The achievements of science, it was maintained, tended to substitute interest in the marvels it performed for the interest which had once belonged to the creations of the mind. Such a theory, it is clear,

1 W. Knight's 'Life of Wordsworth,' Vol. III, p. 238.

presaged, if true, the utter ruin which was eventually to overtake all literature.

For those who were not disposed to accept as a satisfactory explanation this dismal view, there was for the earlier part of this period what has already been suggested as a reason frequently advanced for the decline of poetic production and for the disregard of it when produced. Exciting political questions had loomed up into a prominence they had never held before. They took not merely the first but an almost exclusive place in the minds of men. In the early part of the period under discussion, interest in them had been intensified by the excitement of the July days in Paris, where less than a week had sufficed to crumble into dust the laborious masonry of the Holy Alliance, and to fill Europe with unrest, and with doubt as to what the future had in store. This had been followed in England by the reform agitation, whose approach had been felt before even its outlines could be detected in visible shape, and whose presence, when it actually came, engrossed the thoughts of men and stirred their hearts with alternate hopes and fears. Against the all-absorbing interest in questions which involved the happiness of the individual and of the race, how could poetry hope to maintain itself? But when the same indifference continued to be manifested after the storm had passed away, and men had fallen into their old routine, nothing was left the believers in this particular cause but the conviction expressed by Wordsworth that there had been an overproduction and the consequent surfeit had cloyed the appetite.

Again and again was the remark repeated that scores and even hundreds of books existed in manuscript that would do honor to the country and the age, but for which publication could not be secured.

Observations of this sort have been given, not because of their truth, but of their prevalence. They are the very same which are heard during every literary interregnum when the old poetic spirit has been worn out and the new has not yet embodied itself, or at least has not yet become distinctly recognizable. It may be indeed that after a period of great intellectual fertility the human mind actually needs and demands a season in which to lie fallow in order to recruit its exhausted energies. Even if production continues, it is apt to be of a different character, as if the principle of the rotation of crops were as true applied to the brain as it is to the soil. Nor will the correctness of such an inference be seriously impaired because some sporadic and shining example of vigorous growth shoots up in contrast to the general barrenness. But whether the theory be well founded or not, there is no question as to the prevalence at this time of those dolorous forecasts about the future of literature, especially of the highest form of it, which regularly follow the subsidence of every period of great creative activity. The old utterances again recur in almost the same words. There is no outlook for the continuance of poetry, we are told; no hope for its proper appreciation. If offered, it will not be published; if published, it cannot be sold. This may be true on a small scale. But the valuable works which

continue to exist in manuscript form a body of literature, about the greatness of which the mind grows increasing skeptical with advancing years.

There seems also to have been during the period under discussion a general agreement on the part of the critics that the condition of things just depicted was entirely the fault of the readers and not at all that of the writers. It apparently did not occur to any one of those complaining of the indifference of the public, that the public had a right to be indifferent; that the reason it did not read the new works of the old masters was largely because they were not worth reading. In truth, it may in some slight measure reconcile us to the early death of Keats and Shelley and Byron when we consider how little of value was produced by any of their great contemporaries after reaching the age the most long-lived of these three attained. The reputation of their survivors rests mainly upon what they did, either in youth or before youth had fully passed away. Not that occasional sparks of inspiration did not flash forth afterward; but in the case of most, the poetic fire had almost wholly abated or vanished entirely. The history of the great authors of the older Georgian generation who, though advancing towards later life, were still, in 1830, in the full possession of intellectual force, bears extraordinary testimony to the truth already stated that great poetic performance belongs usually to the period of comparative youth. They produced but little; and the little they produced was in general worth little.

There were still several members of the older generation that were more or less actively engaged in literary production in 1830, and in the decade or decades following. They all continued to occupy a high position in the eyes of the public. Those of them who at that period were most conspicuous were Moore, Campbell, Wordsworth, and Southey, to whom is to be added for the brief time he lived, Coleridge. There was another group that ranked then lower in the general estimation, though each of them had a body of admirers and followers of his own, who rated him in some cases higher than most of those just mentioned. The members of this second group were Landor, Leigh Hunt, and Rogers. It can be said justly of the five mentioned of the first group, that whatever poetic reputation they had achieved, they had achieved long before. They were not to add to it by anything they produced after. In the case of Moore the decline of production was due rather to the distraction of other pursuits than to any actual failure of such ability as he possessed. Still in a general way his career bears out the truth of the proposition that the work which made the men of the elder generation famous was the work of the first half of their lives. Moore did not die till 1852. His 'Lalla Rookh' was brought out in 1817 when he was thirty-eight years old. The poetry he produced after that date is now so little read that it can hardly be said to enjoy that quasi-distinction which consists in being read about.

Much more marked, however, in this respect was the case of Campbell, who was still a prominent lit-

erary figure in 1830, and did not die until 1844. During the period between these years he was living largely upon his past reputation; so far as posterity is concerned, he was living entirely upon it. He was in 1830, and had been for some time before, the editor of 'The New Monthly Magazine'; but to the fortunes of that periodical he contributed nothing but his name. The wits of 'Blackwood' used to declare that every month the reader was allured by the pleasures of hope, but it invariably ended for him in the pains of possession. The truth about him was voiced by 'Fraser's Magazine' with all the brutality of its early utterance. It expressed regret that he did not die after the publication of 'Gertrude of Wyoming.' "Had he had such good fortune," it said, "we should have had the imaginations of the whole world in his favour, fancying what he *might* have done, had he lived, to enhance to extravagance the value of what he had *then* done."[1] In truth, a good deal of Campbell's later life was, what he once incidentally called a portion of it, "serious idleness." The works by which his name survives belong almost exclusively to the period of his youth. He was born in 1777. At the age of twenty-two he sprang at once into fame with the publication of 'The Pleasures of Hope.' Between 1799, the year in which that poem appeared, and 1810, when 'O'Connor's Child' came out, nearly all of the poetry, upon which his fame is based, was produced. Two or three short pieces are at most all that is much read now of the works he composed during

[1] 'Fraser's Magazine,' June, 1830, Vol. I, p. 563.

the more than thirty years which made up the rest of his life. It was a sort of carpentering at literature in which he henceforth engaged. He wrote criticism; he wrote history; he wrote travels; he wrote biography; he edited magazines; but he produced no great creative work. In his case the soil was in a certain way rich, but it was also very thin. The growth of one crop exhausted it. This cannot be said of Coleridge now drawing towards the grave; yet in this particular there was a marked similarity in the lives of the two men. Coleridge was born in 1772, and his career as a producer of poetry, which is now read and studied, may be said to have ended in 1802; for though some of his finest pieces, as for instance, 'Kubla Khan' and 'Christabel,' were published many years after the latter date, they had been written many years before they appeared in print.

In 1830 the position of Wordsworth at the head of living English poets was generally recognized, though in some quarters the old prejudice survived. Still, he had now reached that degree of popularity that every new work he put forth was hailed by the entire critical press with respectful approval if not with enthusiastic commendation. Yet it is as true of him as it is of the others that he had long ceased to produce anything by which he is now generally known and admired. What is greatest in his production belongs to the period of youth. Matthew Arnold was one of the most thoroughgoing of his partisans. He was willing to rank him just below Milton, and with true British insularity placed him, with the exception of Goethe,

above all the writers of the Continent after the death of Molière. Yet he insists that it was between 1798 and 1808 that Wordsworth not only produced nearly everything by which he is now remembered, but nearly everything which is worthy of remembrance. This must be regarded as a pretty extravagant way of putting things; yet, when we take into account certain poems which appeared in the edition of 1815, it is to be conceded that the larger part of his best work was produced within the limits Arnold set.

One exception there was at the opening of the fourth decade of the century to the general indifference which was manifested towards poetry and poets. This was furnished by Lord Byron. Against his all-conquering personality the partisans of other authors had made little headway during his life. The circumstances of his death had tended to retard the approach of that depreciatory estimate which is fairly certain to overtake, for a time at least, any exceedingly popular writer, when once the ascendency and sway exercised by his living presence have been withdrawn. Consequently, though Byron had been dead several years, his influence still dominated literature. It long continued to prevail over that of the greatest of the contemporaries who survived him. In his case, too, if interest in him and his fortunes had at all begun to wane, it was revived at this very time by the publication of his letters accompanied by Moore's biography, which brought again vividly before the public the incidents of his stormy and checkered career.

Few at the present day have the slightest conception

of the profound sensation which the death of Byron created in the whole of Europe. He was still young. He had barely passed the middle point of man's allotted life upon earth. About him there had been from the outset the fascination of brilliant personal achievement. What he did had in one way kept all Europe in a state of astonishment and awe; as in another way and in another sphere had been effected by Napoleon. There was time enough for him to accomplish much more. No one could imagine what new literary enterprises he might undertake, what new conquests he might achieve, when he suddenly passed away. The element of unexpectedness was reinforced by the circumstances under which he died. To the interest felt in him as a poet had been added the interest of chivalric adventure. He himself had always been in fullest intellectual sympathy with the party of progress. By the liberals of the Continent he was regarded as one of their leaders. The same position he had held while resident in England. No one who familiarizes himself with the newspapers of the time can fail to note that much of the personal hostility that beset Byron after the separation from his wife, and that followed him in his retreat from his native land, had been due to the character of his political opinions and utterances, which were peculiarly offensive to the Tory party then in the first flush of its triumph over Napoleon. The closing acts of his career had been in fullest harmony with the sentiments he professed. He had fallen while sharing in the struggle of a race to regain its lost liberties. The

cause for which he gave up his life had for nearly a century enlisted the active interest of the whole educated class in Christendom. It now received a double consecration. To it the most brilliant poet of the century had fallen a martyr in the prime of life.

It was inevitable therefore that the news of his sudden death should have come upon all Europe with a sense of shock. But if the sensation produced by it in other countries was great, it naturally reached its culmination in his own. He had been driven from it by unreasoning clamor. Yet his fame and influence grew with the distance which separated him from his native land, and with the time which elapsed without his revisiting it. He in turn had disowned it, he had unceasingly satirized it. Yet there can be little question that he gave expression to the deepest feelings of his heart, when, after declaring that it was possible for a man to make for himself anywhere a country, he went on to say:

> Yet I was born where men are proud to be,
> Not without cause; and should I leave behind
> The inviolate island of the sage and free,
> And seek me out a home by a remoter sea,
>
> Perchance I loved it well; and if I lay
> My ashes in a soil which is not mine,
> My spirit shall resume it—if we may
> Unbodied choose a sanctuary. I twine
> My hopes of being remembered in my line
> With my land's language: if too fond and far
> These aspirations in their scope incline,—
> If my fame should be, as my fortunes are,
> Of hasty growth and blight, and dull Oblivion bar

My name from out the temple where the dead
Are honored by the nations—let it be—
And light the laurels on a loftier head!
And be the Spartan's epitaph on me,
'Sparta hath many a worthier son than he.'

In England where nearly the whole body of the younger men of letters recognized Byron as their liege lord, the excitement caused by his death was unprecedented. There is plenty of evidence as to the existence of the impression created by it which can be found stated not merely in general terms, but given as the expression of individual feeling. Hazlitt in an article in 'The Edinburgh Review' for July, 1824, had spoken of the death of Shelley and of Keats. "To this band of immortals," he continued, "a third has since been added—a mightier genius, a haughtier spirit, whose stubborn impatience and Achilles-like pride only death could quell. Greece, Italy, the world have lost their poet-hero; and his death has spread a wider gloom, and been recorded with a deeper awe than has waited on the obsequies of the many great who have died in our remembrance. Even detraction has been silent at his tomb; and the more generous of his enemies have fallen into the ranks of his mourners." The description which Tennyson gave of his own state of mind when he heard of the poet's death has already been recorded.

Yet the enthusiastic worship of the boy pales before the avowal of her early feelings by the delicate and spiritual Mrs. Browning, while still Miss Barrett. She was an ardent but by no means indiscriminating

admirer of Wordsworth. About him she had many controversies with her old friend and instructor, Hugh Stuart Boyd, who continued to retain at a later period the prejudices against that poet which had been prevalent in his youth. He admitted, however, on one occasion that she was liberal in conceding the merit of Byron's poetry. She resented the remark warmly. She would not be praised for acknowledging the excellence of works which she had always admired and loved, and always expected to admire and love. "Why, when I was a little girl,"—this was said in 1842—"I used to think seriously of dressing up like a boy and running away to be Lord Byron's page."[1] This would not have been hard to conceive in the case of some women; but it is extraordinary in the view it gives of Byron's hold upon the public when it comes from the lips of a woman like Mrs. Browning.

Feelings of this kind could not continue. The history of literature shows nothing more distinctly than the rise and fall of reputations, or perhaps it would be more correct to say, their oscillations from highest popularity to comparative neglect. This is not to say that any great poet is ever forgotten, even for a time, or that he ever fails to have somewhere a body of admirers and partisans; only that there are certain periods when he occupies in the estimate of the great body of men a loftier position than he does at others. There are apt to be particular stages in the mental growth of an individual when he falls almost com-

[1] Letter to H. S. Boyd of December 4, 1842, in 'Letters of E. B. Browning,' Vol. I, p. 115.

pletely under the influence of some special writer. He admires him, he celebrates him, he vaunts his superiority to others; if he himself writes, he is fairly certain to imitate him. But such states of mind are never likely to be permanent. The disciple may always continue to entertain regard for the man he once worshipped; but that exclusive regard which he felt gives way to a less enthusiastic and absorbing feeling. The truth is that there are poets suited to different periods in the lives of each of us, just as there are poets suited to the different tastes and temperaments of all of us.

What is true of the individual is true of a whole people. A great writer will make himself the special mouthpiece of a generation. To its hopes and fears, its aspirations, its vague longings, he will give their clearest and fullest expression. But when that particular mood is passed—as in time it is destined to pass—he is certain to lose all that element of popularity which depends upon community of feeling and of sentiment. He must thenceforth depend upon the general power he has displayed, independent of the circumstances and the times which have given to his writings special vogue. In that he is sure to have rivals; it is possible that he may have superiors. The revolutions of time and taste may bring, and in some cases are fairly sure to bring, him for a season something of his old vogue; though it can hardly hope to make his influence a second time overwhelmingly predominant. Accordingly we can always rely upon the occasional recurrence of modified Byronic revivals.

There are certain qualities in that poet which tend to make him a power among men, and at particular periods a great power. There are elements in his work wherein he scarcely finds a competitor. He brought to English literature a force and fire to which it had hitherto been a stranger; and beside the headlong impetuosity and tumultuous energy of his verse, the most strenuous efforts of other men seem often as tame and inadequate as the jets of water spouting from a fountain in a pleasure ground, compared with the rush and roar of a mighty mountain torrent plunging down to the valley from the regions of eternal snow.

By 1830 the fame of Byron was just beginning to feel the influence of the change in popular taste. It still remained paramount indeed. It affected all classes and all grades of intellect. Men had come under it, and were continuing to come under it, who by the very bent of their minds were utterly unfitted to fall under its sway; who belonged not merely to another party but to a hostile party. Taylor, for instance, the author of 'Philip Van Artevelde,' was one of those persons whom nature designed for a Wordsworthian pure and simple. Yet he tells us that in his youth he was an enthusiastic admirer of Byron. Nay, more, he has carefully preserved for us and published a copy of a little Byronic poem, the sole survivor of a number of others of the same sort. The best of this poetry he produced was not bad in its kind, he assures us; not indeed without a certain sort of fervor and beauty. Still, the specimen which was

saved from the general wreck, though viewed with a good deal of fondness, and even pride by its author, is not such as to cause deep regret that the others, formed upon the same model, have perished. This early admiration of Byron came to be considered by Taylor morally stultifying; not in the sense that it was debasing, but because it supplanted for the time a more elevating admiration, which of course from his point of view was that of Wordsworth.

These last words of Taylor are worthy of attention because they indicate the hostile attitude which was soon to be assumed towards Byron by large numbers. In 1830 he still remained the most potent force in literature. He was still the one whom nearly every youthful aspirant for poetic honors took consciously or unconsciously as his model. The adherents of other claimants to the throne of letters naturally felt called upon to denounce his pretensions, and in some cases to insist that he had no claim to the title of monarch at all. It ought not to be necessary—though it seems to be necessary—to say that it is as legitimate, as it is common, for any reader to feel and express the preference he entertains for one great author as compared with another. It implies nothing either for or against the degree of his intellectual development. The message—to use the most maudlin phrase which modern criticism has concocted—the message which a particular writer bears, may be that which will satisfy the demands of one nature, while to another it will convey little or nothing of interest or value. Even if the beauty of the verse meet with an intel-

lectual recognition, what the verse contains may supply no spiritual want. It is nothing strange that Wordsworth should be the favorite of some men, Byron the favorite of others, Shelley the favorite of still a third body. Such preference is objectionable only when the appreciation of one author is conjoined with the depreciation of another and a rival author. No writer acquires and continues to maintain a hold upon the cultivated public without the possession of great qualities. The favorable opinion of a large number of educated men is worth infinitely more than the hostile opinion of the very highest genius. Criticism that denies the reputation which has been accorded by the consent of one generation and confirmed by the voice of following generations, serves little other purpose than to reveal the futility of criticism itself and the limitations of the critic.

Accordingly, we must look at the literary situation as it existed then, not with our own eyes, but with the eyes of the men of 1830. At that time the movement against the hitherto unquestioned supremacy of Byron began to make effective manifestation of itself. Along with it an active propaganda was instituted in behalf of two very dissimilar poets, whose reputation, very high in limited circles, had nevertheless up to that time been largely confined to limited circles. One of them indeed had at last entered upon the fulness of his fame; the other was only beginning to loom into prominence. The former was Wordsworth, the latter was Shelley. Wide apart in many ways as were the views of the adherents of these two writers, there was

one thing in which they agreed. They united in their hostility to the claims of the partisans of Byron. They did not dread each other; they dreaded the common foe. Shelley in particular, as being in most need of rehabilitation, became an object of enthusiastic advocacy. During the years that had elapsed since his death he had been by no means forgotten; for from the very outset he had had a band of admirers. Still, in no sense of the phrase could he be said to be well known; in any proper sense he could hardly be said to be known at all. It is natural that revolutions in taste should display themselves most vigorously at great educational centers, if not there receive their origin. The present instance offers no exception. It was at Cambridge University during the term of Tennyson's residence that new critical standards had begun to be set up. Not unnaturally a movement started there into being, designed to further the spread of Shelley's reputation. It was one of the singular features connected with it that some of those most prominent in advocating his claims were equally uncompromising partisans of Wordsworth. The conjunction which would have profoundly shocked the elder poet was, at that time at least, rarely found elsewhere.

It was in 1829 that Arthur Henry Hallam and a number of Shelley's other admirers caused his 'Adonais' to be reprinted at Cambridge in an edition of five hundred copies; for with the worship of Shelley was united the worship of the altogether less known Keats. This elegy on the death of the latter poet had

been printed at Pisa in 1821. It was not till the little band of Cambridge enthusiasts reproduced it in the year just mentioned that it was brought out in England. In fact a not essentially dissimilar state of things was at that time true of most of Shelley's productions. He began his poetical career in 1816 with the volume containing 'Alastor, or the Spirit of Solitude'; for the privately printed 'Queen Mab' of 1813 may be disregarded. The 'Revolt of Islam' followed in 1818, 'Rosalind and Helen' and 'The Cenci' in 1819, 'Prometheus Unbound' in 1820, 'Adonais' and 'Epipsychidion' in 1821. Some of these were brought together in a single volume the year after his death, but very few of them ever went, strictly speaking, into a second edition. In truth, Shelley's name, so far as it was known then, was much more associated in the minds of men with his atheistical utterances and his extreme social opinions than with his poetry. It is a significant fact that the one production of his which up to 1830 had gone through the largest number of editions was 'Queen Mab'; and 'Queen Mab,' it is needless to say, appealed rather to the intellectual sinners than to the lovers of highest poetic art. Even later, the other works, in spite of frequent references to them in the critical literature of the day, were often very hard to obtain.

There is one noted instance. The youthful Browning chanced to come across in a collection of second-hand books exposed for sale, a volume which attracted his attention by being labelled "Mr. Shelley's Atheistical Poem, very scarce." He was so impressed by

the hasty perusal he was able to give it that he implored his mother to procure for him all the productions of this author, of whom before he had never heard. It was no easy task to comply with his wishes. The local booksellers all shared in the boy's ignorance of the poet. They were no more familiar than he with the writer's name, nor did they know the titles of the works he had written. At last the volumes were secured at the shop of the Olliers in Vere Street, by whom most of them had been published. With the exception of 'The Cenci' all were first editions. Browning's experience illustrates with a fair degree of accuracy the general indifference about Shelley which existed on the part of the public. This had naturally the effect of stimulating the enthusiasm of his partisans. What they lacked in numbers they made up, as far as they could, in activity. In that brilliant circle which was just at this time assembled in Cambridge University, devotion to this poet was very intense. A Shelley cult was established there. It flourished for a while with both the vigor and the extravagance of youth. Its band of worshippers exalted to the highest place one who to the great body of readers was an unknown god. Like every missionary propaganda, its first aim was to destroy the prevailing religion; and the prevailing religion was Byron. To proclaim the superiority of Shelley to Byron was accordingly a leading principle of the new creed.

There is little doubt from their later utterances, that the Cambridge men of 1830 outgrew their enthusiasm

and came in time to be amused by it themselves—in some instances in a very short time. But their enthusiasm was very earnest while it lasted. They set out to convert the world to their belief. The record of one of their enterprises has been preserved. Shelley had been illtreated, as they thought, by the authorities of the sister university. He had been expelled from it. He who was a glory to the institution had received from it scant favor while he was an attendant upon it, and no recognition of his greatness since. It struck these youthful admirers who belonged to the Cambridge Union, that it would be a good thing to go over to Oxford and hold a debate with the members of the Union there on the comparative merits of Shelley and Byron. Permission was sought for the undertaking from the Master of Trinity, Christopher Wordsworth, the brother of the poet. The delegation consisted of Arthur Henry Hallam, Richard Monckton Milnes, and Thomas Sunderland. In his later year Milnes used to insinuate that it was not made perfectly clear to the venerable dignitary who presided over Trinity, whether it was the superiority of Shelley to Byron that they were going forth to maintain, or the superiority of Wordsworth to Byron. At all events, the permission was obtained. Early in December, 1829, they set out on their mission. It was then a long trip of ten hours by the post-chaise, and the pleasure of the journey was not increased by the fact that snow had fallen. On reaching Oxford they were entertained by the members of the rival Union. Of one of these Milnes wrote to his mother

that he was sure he was a "very superior person." This very superior person was young Mr. Gladstone of Liverpool. He, however, took no part in the discussion.

The debate, we are told, went off in very fine style; but as regards the impression produced, it must have been somewhat disappointing. According to the report of Milnes[1] as late as 1866, the Cambridge delegation, in all the fervor of their early enthusiasm, had their feelings very much shocked and their vanity a good deal wounded to find that no one at Oxford knew anything at all about Mr. Shelley, either for good or ill. It was a mortifying fact to discover that no small number of the eighty or ninety young gentlemen of the Oxford Union, who sat sprucely dressed in chairs or lounged about the fireplace, fancied that it was Mr. Shenstone they had come to talk about, and declared that they knew of only one poem of his, that beginning with the words, "My banks, they are furnished with bees." A very little later a contemporary gave an account of the result of this particular missionary enterprise to establish the superiority of Shelley to Byron. "Sunderland, Milnes, and Hallam," wrote Blakesley to Trench, "made an expedition to Oxford, and spoke there in favor of the former, thereby of course procuring to themselves the reputation of atheists. Howbeit they gained some converts and spread the knowledge of the poet, so that some *illuminati* of the sister university, who at first took him for Shenstone, and then for 'the man who drives

[1] 'Life, Letters, and Friendships,' Vol. II, p. 163.

the black ponies in Hyde Park,' at last went away with the belief 'that he was a man whom Lord Byron *patronized,* and who was drowned a few years ago.' "[1]

In his 'Reminiscences,' Sir Francis Hastings Doyle asserts that the statements made about this memorable debate by two of its participants—Lord Houghton and Cardinal Manning—are hazy and incorrect; but his own version differs from theirs only in unimportant particulars. Doyle tells us that it was he himself, acting under Cambridge influences, who brought forward for discussion in the Oxford Union a motion that Shelley was a greater poet than Byron. It would, he said, have been a perfectly languid debate, as were all non-political ones, had it not been for the arrival of the Cambridge men. This was sufficient to fill the benches. Of these Cambridge men, Sunderland spoke first. He was followed by Hallam. They in turn were followed by Oldham of Oriel who proceeded vigorously to pooh-pooh the pretensions of Shelley, of whom he knew absolutely nothing, till he chanced to catch sight of Milnes waiting to fall upon him. At once he lost heart and to the mingled amazement and amusement of his hearers went over to the side he had begun by attacking. After the speech of Milnes a short silence followed. The truth is that the Oxford advocates of Byron were a good deal at a loss what to say: for in general they were not merely unacquainted with the poetry of Shelley, they were unaware of even the existence of the man himself. This explains the hesitation that prevailed. Finally Manning of Balliol,

[1] R. C. Trench's 'Letters and Memorials,' Vol. I, p. 50.

the virtual leader of the Union, rose to reply to the arguments of the Cambridge men. According to Doyle the substance of his argument was essentially as follows: Byron was a great poet because he had been read by them all. Consequently he was known to them all. If Shelley had been a great poet, he would have been read by them all and necessarily would have been known to them all. As this was not the case, he was not a great poet. All the more it followed that he was not so great a poet as Byron. In this view, when it came to a vote, the Union concurred by a large majority.[1]

Doyle, though he does not mention it, was the one who opened the debate. He was followed by Sunderland, the first of the Cambridge trio. Sunderland is the person referred to in Tennyson's sketch, entitled 'A Character.' From that it may easily be gathered that he was far from being a favorite of the poet. He was further described by him as "a very plausible, parliament-like, self-satisfied speaker at the Union Debating Society." Sunderland retorted in his turn. When told that he was the one meant in the poem just mentioned, he remarked, "Oh, really, and *which* Tennyson did you say wrote it? The slovenly one?" The poet's opinion of the man was assuredly not shared by his fellow students. They looked up to him with admiration. To him they awarded the palm of oratory. The highest expectations were entertained of the brilliancy of his future. Whether their anticipations would have been fulfilled, it is of course impos-

[1] F. M. Brookfield's 'Cambridge Apostles,' p. 130.

sible to say; for shortly after graduation he was seized by a mysterious malady under which he lingered a physical and intellectual wreck until his death in 1867. He ended, it is said, in believing himself the Almighty—which, however, is not an altogether unexampled state of mind in men assumed to be perfectly sane.

But there is no question as to the profound impression wrought by Sunderland on this occasion upon his Oxford hearers, though his two comrades thought at the time that he was hardly up to his usual level. More than two years later Charles Wordsworth in a letter to his brother Christopher spoke of a great oration which Gladstone had delivered in a political debate which had taken place in the Oxford Union. It was, he wrote, "the most splendid speech, out and out, that was ever heard in our Society—not excepting Sunderland's Shelleian harangue."[1] That harangue, by the profound impression it made, evidently served as a standard to measure the efforts of others. The Oxford men were clearly at a disadvantage in this debate. In addition to knowing nothing about Shelley, the decorous and self-restrained men of the sister university were struck with astonishment and almost bewildered by the fervor and fire of the Cambridge speakers. They felt very much, according to their own description, as the polished Romans of the later empire must have felt on coming into contact with the rude barbarians of the North when they swept down upon them

[1] Letter of May 24, 1831, in Charles Wordsworth's 'Annals of my Early Life,' 1891, p. 86.

from their wintry clime. "Both Monckton Milnes and Henry Hallam," wrote Cardinal Manning in November, 1866, "took us aback by the boldness and freedom of their manner. But I remember the effect of Sunderland's declamation and action to this day. It had never been seen or heard before among us; we cowered like birds, and ran like sheep."[1]

The different accounts of this debate are of interest, because, however much they vary in details, they all agree in their representations of the general ignorance that prevailed about Shelley and his poetry among the educated public at the beginning of the fourth decade of the nineteenth century. Outside of a limited circle he was little spoken of, and when spoken of, it was not unfrequently to his disadvantage. But during the period from 1830 to 1840 his reputation rose rapidly. His still unpublished writings were brought out either separately or in the shape of contributions to periodicals. Not merely the willingness but the anxiety of editors to secure them shows how rapidly the interest in the man and in his productions was rising. The references to him in the critical literature of this fourth decade not only increase in number but in the warmth of the testimony they pay to his genius. For the change in opinion that was going on, there was ample reason. The little that had been known of him previously, especially as reported by his enemies, was usually of an offensive nature. His course had seemed to outrage all the social traditions and moral beliefs of his native land. What information was now com-

[1] E. S. Purcell's 'Life of Cardinal Manning,' 1896, Vol. I, p. 33.

ing to light redounded ordinarily to his credit. Much indeed of what he had done could not be palliated by sophistry or condoned by the circumstances by which he was surrounded. A feeling of this sort was almost universal. Even in the most favorable notices of his career or of his writings there was apt to be a regretful reference to the life he had lived, and the opinions he had entertained and promulgated. But there was also a disposition to forget and forgive his follies and his faults on the part of the sternest of his critics, as well as to pay due honor to his unquestionable genius. The general critical attitude of the fourth decade towards Shelley may be summed up in the admission that he was a fallen angel, to be sure; but that after all it is a good deal to be an angel, even if a fallen one; and that for the sake of the noun the adjective could be endured.

Yet in spite of the steadily increasing regard entertained for Shelley there is one bibliographical fact which shows unmistakably how little, comparatively speaking, was the hold which he had gained as yet over the general public of educated men. It was not till 1839, fifteen years after his death, that an authorized edition of his works, purporting to be in any way complete, was brought out under the supervision of his widow. Even this was not really complete. In deference to what was called morality, 'Queen Mab' was omitted from the first edition. It was not until indignant protest came from the admirers of the poet that it was added to the edition which speedily followed. Up to this time the public that wished to read Shelley

had been obliged to content itself either with the original editions of his writings, even then none too easy to get, or with the imperfect and vilely printed collections which came out in two volumes from the booksellers. Doubtless had he lived, the general recognition of his genius would have come earlier with the impression made upon the world of readers by the production of new works, or new editions of old works. But it was making rapid progress during this period of transition, and by the end of it he had taken a position from which he has never been displaced.

To Keats this fortune came even later. During the fourth decade of the century his name is but little mentioned, either with praise or blame, in the critical literature of the period; and when it does occur, it is frequently, perhaps in most cases, spelled wrongly. Many of the few references to him could well have been spared; for they were too often expressions of contumely and contempt. Yet, after all, such outgivings are apt to be misleading and in this instance time has shown their utter delusiveness. The acknowledgment of his greatness would have come speedily had he survived. Even at that early period more than one counterbalancing view came from high critical authority. There were those, then, who believed that if he lived he would be the head of the following generation of poets. "Lamb places him next to Wordsworth," wrote Henry Crabb Robinson in December, 1820—"not meaning any comparison, for they are dissimilar." His early death delayed the general recognition of his genius until the fifth decade of the century; but the

interest in him and his writings had been slowly gathering force and volume during the intervening years. When at last it burst forth into public manifestation, it overbore at once all opposition. During the period of transition, however, it influenced comparatively few; but one of the few it influenced deeply; and he was the man who was destined to be the dominant force in the literature of the Victorian period. Even in that early day, those who were the admirers of Keats recognized in Tennyson the one upon whom his mantle had fallen; but neither of the two then attracted the attention of any but the most limited number.

CHAPTER VI

THE LITERARY SITUATION IN THE TRANSITION PERIOD

Part Three

Popular Authors of the Period

The decade between 1830 and 1840 has been styled in the preceding sections the literary interregnum. The limits might perhaps be justifiably extended so as to include the years between the death of Byron in 1824 and the publication of the Tennyson volumes of 1842. During this period poems were produced and published which stand now much higher in the public estimation than they did then. Their merit indeed was often little recognized at the time. Only one man is remembered by us at the present day who attained high reputation among those of his contemporaries whose opinion was worth considering. In the decade which witnessed the advent of Tennyson and Browning, the single new poetic reputation, accepted by critical contemporaries, which still survives, was achieved by a writer even then unknown save to a comparatively limited number of readers and never in fact widely known since. Still though his superiority was acknowledged at the time by but a small circle, it was a circle that carried with

it the most authoritative estimate of contemporary opinion. During the period under discussion, his poetry was generally rated as far superior to that of his two countrymen, whom we look upon as the great representative authors of the Victorian era; and this continued to be the case to some extent to a much later date.

This man was Henry Taylor, who in 1869 was made Knight Commander of the Order of St. Michael and St. George. For a good share of his life he was nominally a clerk in the colonial office, but really one of the rulers of the colonies. From his boyhood he had been addicted to literature. Born in the last year of the eighteenth century, he had published in 1827 a play entitled 'Isaac Comnenus.' It fell dead from the press. A criticism of it by Southey in 'The Quarterly Review' for October, 1828, failed to revive it in spite of its very favorable character. Its ill fortune did not discourage the author who professed himself to be naturally of an unhopeful state of mind; but it prevented his feeling any desire to hurry into print a second time. In fact, several years elapsed before he was ready to try again his fortune with the public. Southey had suggested to him as the subject of a drama the story of the Flemish leader, Philip Van Artevelde. The idea pleased him. In 1828 he began work upon the poem so far as the pressure of official duties would give him leisure. When finished, the difficulty was to find a publisher. Murray, who had brought out 'Isaac Comnenus,' had a lively recollection of the failure of that drama, and was not disposed to repeat the experiment. Moxon,

to whom he was referred, was likewise not enthusiastic. Still, as the author was willing to bear the expense of publication, he was willing to take the work upon those terms.

Taylor and his friends belonged to the Wordsworthian school, the first article in whose creed was that a work of genius could not be popular until the proper taste had been created to appreciate it. This would be a comfortable doctrine to believe in case of failure, were there not so many thousands of authors, good and bad, and generally bad, with whom one has to share its consolations. Taylor fancied that his work was at issue with the taste of the public and therefore necessarily superior to it. Consequently it could not hope to achieve pecuniary success or to bring him speedy reputation. Nevertheless he made the venture. Accordingly a limited edition in two volumes of five hundred copies of the drama of 'Philip Van Artevelde' came out early in June, 1834.

The publication had been kept back in order to have the work make its appearance at the same time with the laudatory notice in the 'Quarterly,' written by Lockhart; for that review practised as one of its first virtues that its contributors should be aided. There were also several other articles in praise of it immediately after its appearance, written by personal friends for the leading critical weeklies. How far its favorable reception was due to these notices it is hard to tell; yet there seems little reason to doubt that without them, the merit of the drama would have secured its speedy recognition. At all events, the work

was a success, at least what the author deemed success. The general tone of approval was such as no other poetical work received from the principal leading literary periodicals during the period from 1830 to 1850. Taylor as a Wordsworthian ought to have been profoundly grieved by his good fortune; but such is the perversity of human nature, he was sincerely delighted. His duty was to believe that he had shown himself a middling poet by having at once pleased the public. On the contrary he evinced a most reprehensible preference for present fame to any arrears of renown in reversion. Greville, his intimate friend, tells us in his diary that the author with the vivacity of a sanguine disposition and a confidence in the sterling merits of the poem, believed that edition would follow edition like wave upon wave.[1] Taylor himself mentions with pride in his autobiography that the first edition was almost immediately sold, and a new one had to be put in press without delay.

One may get a somewhat false idea of the success of the work from this account. The first edition consisted, as has been said, of but five hundred copies; and whatever was the number of the second, it supplied for some time all the demand that existed. The work continued to have a steady and respectable sale but not a great one. In 1835 Moxon informed Browning that 'Artevelde' had not paid expenses by thirty-odd pounds. This refers to the first edition which, though it was all sold, Greville reports as giving a

[1] C. C. F. Greville's 'Journal of the Reigns of George IV and William IV,' under date of July 24, 1834.

balance against Taylor of thirty-seven pounds when his account with the publisher was made up. One comes in time to have an immense respect for the system of bookkeeping prevailing in the trade, so generally successful is it in bringing the author into debt.

Taylor could therefore content himself after all with the fact that, however well spoken of by the critics, his work had met with no great sale among the herd; and this was a state of things which continued to be true during the more than half-century of life that followed. Still, in spite of its comparatively limited circulation, 'Philip Van Artevelde' was a very genuine success. For several years following its publication the estimation in which it was held was sufficient to make Taylor not only a poet of distinction in the eyes of the cultivated, but *the* poet of distinction of the younger men then coming forward. His future was regarded as assured. His society was courted. The doors of Lansdowne House and of Holland House—then the two great literary salons—were, he tells us himself, thrown open. During the rest of the fourth decade and even later, he was a far more prominent figure in literature than any of the great younger writers who were just then setting out on their career of fame. He admits that this period of sudden celebrity was overclouded or rather outshone in the course of time; but he assures us that it was very agreeable while it lasted. The year 1842 that saw the rise of Tennyson marked the beginning of the subsidence of Henry Taylor. Yet many kept up their faith in him as the leading poet of the younger generation for a

much longer period. Evidence of this feeling can be found plentifully not merely in the critical literature of the day, but in the correspondence of eminent men.

This contemporary estimate, coming from the persons it did, very likely affected Taylor's attitude towards his brother poets. There is found in his autobiography a curious passage in a letter to him of about 1860 from Tennyson's neighbor, Mrs. Cameron. The object of Mrs. Cameron's hero-worship was her correspondent. She annoyed some people but amused a far larger number by rating Tennyson inferior to Taylor as a poet. "Alfred," she writes, "has grown, he says, much fonder of you since your two last visits here. He says he feels now he is beginning to know you and not to feel afraid of you, and that he is beginning to get over your extreme insolence to him when he was young and you were in your meridian splendor of glory. So one reads your simplicity.'"[1] It may be that it did indicate a misunderstanding on Tennyson's part of Taylor's simplicity—or again it may not. But it certainly makes manifest the position held by the two poets in the general estimation of the time. Whatever may have been the private opinion of their comparative merits entertained by the greater author, it is clear that he then recognized plainly that in the eyes of the public his station was much lower.

Taylor never repeated this early success. From time to time he put forth new dramatic pieces of much more than average merit; but none of them attained to the popularity of this, his second venture. It is curious

[1] 'Autobiography of Henry Taylor,' Vol. II, p. 193.

to note that the result was foreseen by some of the men who noticed this work; and as literary history is full of illustrations of critical obtuseness, it is just that examples of critical insight should occasionally be given. The reviewer in 'The Literary Gazette,' clearly ignorant of the personality of the author, and indeed fancying him a man of advanced age, praised the work highly under that impression. He declared that it was the fruit of a life. "As it has no precursor," he wrote, "we doubt its having a successor." So far as the public was concerned, it never had a successor. Taylor's later productions were received with that calm and languid approval which is more disheartening to an author who has once met with favor, than the most ferocious criticism. In 1842 he brought out an historical drama entitled 'Edwin, the Fair,' and in 1850 still another drama originally entitled 'The Virgin Widow,' and subsequently 'A Sicilian Summer.' This was an effort on his part to revive the Elizabethan comedy of romance. Indeed, all his pieces are imitative of the language of the playwrights of that period. It met with no particular success, though he himself preferred it, at least in many ways, to his other productions. "The World," he said in 1858, "cared nothing about 'The Virgin Widow,' and would not read it, though it had always seemed to me the pleasantest play I had written, and I never could tell why people would not be pleased with it."[1] His last production—and with it his poetical career terminated—was entitled 'St. Clement's Eve.' It came out in June, 1862,

[1] 'Autobiography,' Vol. II, p. 41.

and according to his own account had a better reception than the previous comedy. Of an edition of fifteen hundred copies, nine hundred had been sold in six months. But none of these plays attained either to the sale or the reputation of the work which had brought him his first fame. To the day of his death—Taylor lived until 1886—he was known and spoken of as the author of 'Philip Van Artevelde.'

There may be many now who will be disposed to smile at the extravagant language which was used by the critics of the thirties and later in praise of this production. Yet there was a good deal to justify the enthusiasm which they expressed. There was much in the work which bore out fully the eulogies which were heaped upon it. The choice of the subject was a particularly happy one, and there was a philosophic tone about the whole production which lifted it into a much higher atmosphere than that of the popular poetry of the day. Though a drama, it was not intended for stage representation. The opening sentence of the preface seems to indicate that its length was the main objection in the author's eyes. He there says that the two parts and the interlude, of which the entire work consists, are equal in length to about six such plays as are adapted to representation. Still in spite of this disclaimer the experiment was tried. Macready, who ought to have been a first-class judge, was profoundly impressed by the drama upon its appearance. His diary contains a number of references to it. He censured what he considered the affectation seen in the coining of unrequired words and the occasional obscur-

ity; but withal, he said, "there is so much truth, philosophy, poetry, and beauty, combined with passion and descriptive power of no ordinary character, that I was obliged to force myself to lay the book down." It continued a favorite work with him, and when a dozen years later, he met the author personally, the idea of bringing out the piece on the stage seemed to have occurred to him. The project was carried into effect. On November 22, 1847, it was produced at the Princess's Theater where Macready was then acting. It could not be called successful. It was acted but five times. It may be added that the author tells us in his autobiography that he did not see it until the sixth representation—a representation at which it never arrived. Macready gives an exaggerated account of its failure in a passage in his diary in which occurs from his own point of view a brief comment on the result of the first night's performance. "Failed. I cannot think it my fault," he wrote. He was a good deal disappointed. "I certainly laboured," he added, "more than my due in regard to the whole play, and much of my own part of Van Artevelde I acted well; but the play was so under-acted by the people engaged in it, that it broke down under their weight."

In spite of the excellence of its poetry, 'Philip Van Artevelde' had little chance of success as an acting play. This was apparent to the author at the outset; at least he had so expressed himself in the preface to the original work. After it had been produced, he changed his mind, though he conceded that his judgment was not worth much. "My opinion," he wrote,

"... was that the play was by no means ill-suited to the stage, though I should not have hazarded such an opinion had I not seen it there." Looked at from the purely literary point of view, it undoubtedly was then and is now much better suited to the stage than the immense majority of the pieces brought out; but when it is contrasted with any great work of its class, its inferiority in this particular is at once recognized. The undramatic character of 'Philip Van Artevelde' is shown in almost every scene. It is really a novel in blank verse, or as the author himself called it, an Historical Romance cast in dramatic form. The characters are revealed to us; they do not reveal themselves. Long before they appear, at least before they become prominent, they are carefully described. So far from experiencing any surprise at anything they do, we are prepared for it, we anticipate it. There is in consequence a lack of exciting situations; nothing of the startling effect of the unexpected, in which the drama delights. This laborious preparation of the mind for what is coming is conspicuous in the way the chief character is heralded. Philip Van Artevelde is to be the great leader of Ghent against the Earl of Flanders. It takes the whole of the first act to get him into his situation, and by the time he has got there, we know him so well that we feel confident just how he must conduct himself.

Such a method of depicting characters is legitimate in the novel, but it does not do for the stage. As a drama pure and simple the work fails therefore in dramatic art. Furthermore, while showing throughout

poetic ability of a high order, it does not reach the heights occupied by poetic genius. This is the impression which, it seems, the dispassionate reading of the work ordinarily makes upon the large majority of cultivated men. We respect it, we admire it; but we are not inspired by it. It interests, but it does not stir us profoundly. This is, in fact, the prevailing characteristic of all of Taylor's dramas. We see the same condition of things in the play of 'The Virgin Widow,' the little success of which Taylor professed himself unable to understand. Like 'Philip Van Artevelde,' it is an artificial creation, it is not an organic growth. Both are well-constructed pieces of mechanism, the work of an artist so painstaking and clever, that there is scarcely a place where one can lay a finger on a flaw. But throughout each, life and passion are lacking. Both are anatomical studies, interesting for the skill with which they have been put together, attractive often for the philosophical and poetical garb with which the skeletons are clothed; but they are not living, breathing forces.

Yet Taylor is and will always remain an interesting poet, attractive to the few if never widely read by the many. Furthermore, he must have been a man of very pronounced personality. The deference paid to him by the ablest of his contemporaries, the respect entertained for his opinions and his achievements, show that he must have been possessed of qualities entirely out of the common. To mention two of his most intimate associates out of a very large number, he was a favored friend of both Southey and Wordsworth. John

Sterling, who knew him well, wrote to Trench not long after the publication of 'Philip Van Artevelde' that Taylor had "the best balanced mind—is, on the whole, nearest the perfect man of the ancients—of all I have ever known. His poem seems to me splendid."[1] Towards the close of his life Swinburne, while controverting Taylor's views about Shelley, paid him a tribute of extreme deference, and expressed the highest admiration of his powers—though it must be confessed that Swinburne as a critic has always been subject to attacks of extravagant and irresponsible enthusiasm, in which praise is ladled out with a dreadful profusion of adjectives and a plentiful lack of discrimination.

Still, there is no question as to the high estimation in which Taylor was held during his whole life by men whose good opinion was worth having. Yet with so much to be justly admired, there seems to have been something essentially prosaic in his nature. This may explain in part why with his manifest poetical sensibility he never attained the highest grade as a poet. His failure there is most conspicuous in his lyric pieces. The facility with which blank verse lends itself to expression induces many men to think that they are writing poetry, and their readers to believe that they are reading poetry, when they are only writing and reading a measured sort of prose. But in the instance of the lyric neither writer nor reader can become the victim of any such delusion. We have plenty of proof of this fact in the poem which is inserted as an interlude between the two parts of 'Philip Van Artevelde,'

[1] R. C. Trench's 'Letters,' Vol. I, p. 159.

and in the songs which are scattered through that and others of his dramas. In a certain way some of the latter are quite perfect. They are finished in more senses than one. They are frequently close imitations of the songs found in the plays of the Elizabethan dramatists. But they are palpable imitations. The element of spontaneity is entirely lacking. The best of them are poems of a very high order of mediocrity—so high indeed that some of them have at times imposed upon the trained judgment—but out of the region of high mediocrity they never ascend.

The most striking evidence of the essentially prosaic quality of Taylor's mind is seen in his autobiography. This is a very remarkable work both for what it says and for what it fails to say. There are in it the most astounding revelations in regard to matters which most men are solicitous to keep to themselves. Taylor tells us of his rejection by one woman to whom he made a proposal of marriage. He lets us know further of the difficulty he experienced, both from herself and her family, in securing the woman whom he eventually married. There are revelations of feelings about himself and his writings which are remarkable for nothing so much as for the display they make of the most egregious and unblushing vanity. Such feelings are not peculiar. Nor are they reprehensible, so long as they are kept to one's self; but in the vast majority of cases the man seeks in time to hide them even from his own consciousness, if in truth they have not been beaten out of him by the friction and conflicts which he comes to have with his fellow men.

But even more striking in this autobiography is what Taylor did not put in. During the course of his life he was brought into contact with some of the most eminent men of his time. Several of them he knew intimately. He must have come to be acquainted with much that the world would have been glad to hear and remember. But though their names flit across his pages, they do not enliven them. We are told in several instances of the wise sayings they uttered; but none of these wise sayings are preserved. Something might be said in defence of this course, if it had been due to a determination to respect the sanctity of private conversation. But no such feeling existed on his part. Many of his pages are filled with records and remarks of men of inferior interest—not in all cases because they were inferior men, but because for some reason they have failed to impress themselves upon their time and their countrymen. Furthermore, he gave up much space to family letters, to little events in his own career, to reflections upon his own thoughts and feelings—all of which, though undoubtedly of much interest to himself, are usually of the least conceivable interest to any other human being. The truth is that no one with such opportunities to make an autobiography entertaining could have struggled with much more success to make it dull.

During the period of transition, Taylor was in the eyes of the highly cultivated easily the most commanding figure in English poetry among the younger writers. But as regards popular appreciation he was immeasurably inferior to two authors who began their

literary career at about the same time as he. One of them was a Scotch clergyman named Robert Pollok. He died in 1827 at the age of twenty-nine. This event took place a few months after the poem was published which was to achieve a success the greatest author of any age might have envied. It was entitled 'The Course of Time.' Its sale was extraordinary. In spite of frequent assertions to the contrary, the great work of Milton during the remaining years of the century which followed its publication met with distinct favor. But whatever success it gained pales, as regards general acceptance, with the popularity which waited on the diffuse, and, as a whole, the feeble poem of Pollok. First published in the middle of April, 1827, its second edition did not make its appearance till January of the following year. This consisted of fifteen hundred copies which were disposed of in a fortnight. By June, the fourth edition had been sold out. In a little more than six months, six thousand copies had found buyers. By the close of 1828, twelve thousand copies had been put on the market. This was the beginning of the triumphant career it was to run. Before the third of a century had gone by, eighty thousand copies had been disposed of in Great Britain. The work was received with equal favor in this country. Something of its continued sale here was due to its being frequently used in certain schools as a text-book for parsing—a process which after a fashion kept alive the poem, while necessarily destroying the vitality of what little poetry it actually contained.

But great as was the impression made by Pollok's

work, so far as the public was concerned, it was not in any measure comparable to that produced by the poetry of Robert Montgomery. The difference of conditions under which their respective writings came out, redounded also to the credit of the latter author. Pollok's great success was limited to a single one of his productions. But Montgomery wrote no small number of poems, not one of which—certainly not one of the important pieces—failed to pass through edition after edition. As long as his life lasted, his writings showed no signs of waning popularity. Furthermore, he had not in his favor, as did Pollok, an influential critic like Christopher North, who was indeed so much of a partisan as to find fault more than once with Jeffrey for not sharing in his own enthusiasm about that author. Nor had he behind him the support of a great publishing house like that of 'Blackwood.' Still further, he encountered, what Pollok did not, a constant storm of depreciation and contemptuous personal abuse at a comparatively early period in his career. This came, too, from critical organs, then wielding wide influence. With few exceptions, these heaped upon Montgomery the grossest contumely. The practice began with some of the weeklies and was followed at once by certain monthlies. The three great and presumably all-powerful quarterlies joined later in the attack. His only effective defender in the press was 'The Literary Gazette,' whose editor indeed was about as great as a critic as he himself was great as a poet. Yet all these violent assaults directed against him availed not a particle in retarding his triumphant

progress, so far as that is determined by the wide circulation of his writings. In the hostility he encountered and in its absolute ineffectiveness there is nothing like his experience recorded in the history of English verse. Hostile criticism has occasionally been successful for a time in delaying the reception of really great work. It was absolutely powerless in the case of this writer of inferior work. The story of his life, personal as well as literary, demands in consequence a certain degree of attention, not due at all to the importance of the man or to the value of his productions. But it is an instructive chapter in the history of English literature; for nowhere can be found a more signal example of the futility of criticism to affect the fortunes of a popular favorite.

Robert Montgomery was born at Bath in 1807. He is reported to have been the natural son of one Gomery who acted the part of clown at the theater in that city. He made up to some extent for the lack of legitimacy by prefixing 'Mont' to his father's name, thereby giving himself the more aristocratic appellation of Montgomery. These at least were the statements constantly made by hostile critics. The boy acquired in his school days a reputation for ability. By the time he was twenty years old, he had written and published a satire entitled 'The Age Reviewed.' It came out in 1827, and passed into a second edition, revised and enlarged, in March, 1828. This last year saw also the production of a similar work entitled 'The Puffiad.'[1]

[1] This work is ordinarily put down as having been published in 1830. It came out at the time here stated. It was reviewed in 'The Literary Gazette' for May 31, 1828.

The satire is remarkable for its denunciation of the process by which according to his enemies he himself was later to gain his own reputation. But this work which appeared in May had been preceded by another of an entirely different character through which he sprang at once into reputation and popularity. This was a poem entitled 'The Omnipresence of the Deity.' It came out at the very end of January, 1828, when its author was only twenty-one years old. Far different was its reception by the critics from that which had waited upon his satires. 'The Literary Gazette' which had denounced 'The Age Reviewed' as "unmitigated balderdash" executed at once a change of front. It greeted the work with enthusiasm. In so doing, it reflected a general popular sentiment. It admitted that there were defects in the poem, a feature incident to the early years of the author. But these, it said, were more than atoned for by the beauty and genius displayed in it as a whole. These characteristics placed it in the very highest class of English sacred poetry. This was, in fact, the view generally expressed by the received organs of public opinion which noticed the work at all. 'The Gentleman's Magazine' descanted especially upon the author's loftiness of style. "His language," it said, "rises into a sublimity partaking of inspiration." It had no hesitation in asserting that by the strength of its own great merit the work had "ranked itself among the permanent literature of the nation, in whose language it will be immortal." So general was this chorus of laudation, so steadily did it continue, that Christopher North, the

reigning critic of 'Blackwood's Magazine,' felt called upon to consider the pretensions of this new claimant for the highest of poetical honors. In the number for May, 1828, he devoted more than twenty pages to a review of the poem which, while not enthusiastic, was not condemnatory.

Many works have met with this chorus of eulogy which never appealed to a wide public in the matter of circulation. 'Philip Van Artevelde' is a case in point. It was hailed with perhaps even louder acclaim than this poem of Montgomery's; but far different was the sale of the latter. Published late in January, 1828, a second edition followed in March, a third in April, a fourth in May, a fifth in July, a sixth in August, and a seventh in October. It might be supposed that a sale so enormous would satisfy all possible demands, especially as in October of this same year another volume of religious poems in blank verse made its appearance from the same prolific pen. This one, whose first piece was entitled 'The Universal Prayer,' was expensively printed in quarto with a portrait of the poet to meet the demand of his admirers. In a few weeks a cheaper edition in octavo followed in order to satisfy the cravings of the general public for the intellectual and spiritual nutriment it contained. But the rivalry of the later work did not interfere with the success of the earlier. In January, 1829, 'The Omnipresence of the Deity' had passed into an eighth edition, and in August of that same year into a ninth. The second poem, too, held its own with the first and had almost as wide a sale. It was a source of peculiar gratification to cer-

tain literary critics, in felicitating themselves upon the fact that they had been the first to welcome the dawning of genius, to note that the public taste had now ratified their own. Only a little later they were enabled to announce that Mr. Robert Montgomery, who at so early an age had made so powerful an impression in the highest range of sacred poetry, had in the press a new work. At the very end of the year it was published. It was a poem in blank verse, and entitled 'Satan, or Intellect without God.' In this work, the archenemy of mankind was represented as taking his seat on the top of a high mountain. From that point of vantage he contemplated the universe and gave expression to a series of reflections inspired by what he saw and what he felt. But there was nothing Satanic about this Satan. His utterances were in general unobjectionable, if indeed, they might not be called praiseworthy. A public which, a few years before, had been shocked beyond expression by Byron, who in his 'Cain' had made the devil talk like the devil, was delighted beyond measure in having him discourse very much after the manner of the superintendent of a Sunday school.

Up to this time, Montgomery had had everything his own way. His two volumes of religious poetry had met with a sale which might be justly called phenomenal. Furthermore, so far as the leading critical periodicals of all sorts were concerned, they had either spoken warmly in his favor or had said nothing in his dispraise. His third religious work had been received by his admirers with even greater enthusiasm than

that which had marked the reception of the two previous volumes. The staid and serious 'Gentleman's Magazine,' for instance, declared that the new poem abounded in passages of beauty and sublimity which had few parallels in modern times. The reviewer, in truth, was left in a state of stupefaction by the contemplation of the greatness of the author. "When we think of the youth of Mr. Montgomery," he wrote, "we stand amazed at the height to which his genius and talents have raised him. There is a vigour of mind and a maturity of thought and intellect,—a moral daring united to the finest perception of all that is refined and delicate in taste, exciting at once our surprise and admiration."[1]

But the critical knives that had been sharpening for this favorite of the public now proceeded to get in their work. Success so pronounced would have been certain to provoke envy and jealousy, even had it been fully merited. The reaction against the ridiculous laudation of which Montgomery had been the recipient, speedily showed itself in the corresponding form of excessive vituperation. Some time before, there had indeed been ominous indications of the coming change of attitude. But it was not till the publication of 'Satan' that the long-gathering storm burst in its fury. The onslaught upon the poet was made from every conceivable quarter. Critical missiles were directed against him in periodical after periodical, from the light-armed weeklies to the heavy-armed quarterlies. The attack was begun by 'The Athenæum' which had

[1] 'Gentleman's Magazine,' January, 1830, Vol. C, p. 45.

previously been warm in his praise. It had now undergone a change of ownership and with it a change of view. After speaking of the two previous religious poems as harmless trash, it described the new volume as a wretched production, full of unknown and unnecessary words, bad grammar, unmeaning nonsense and rigmarole, and summarily characterized its author as "unpoetical, unlearned, unreasonable, and ungrammatical, with nothing positive about him but his arrogance and self-conceit."[1] This appeared near the middle of January. Towards the end of the same month, it was followed by a similar review in 'The Atlas.' This weekly described Montgomery's 'Satan' as a good-natured, long-winded, and highly fanciful person who selects for the sake of contrast one of the coldest seats in the universe and delivers a long speech in which he discusses in maudlin English all the known and unknown conditions of our nature. He is represented as being altogether above the restraints of grammar, and as having an unmeasured contempt for the received meanings of words; as a sort of *amende honorable* for the treatment of those now in existence he coins a number of new ones that never had any currency outside of his own special dominions. A little later a northern periodical charged him with vagueness and bombast, musty morality, and trite sublimity.[2]

Two monthlies followed in even a more violent strain of disparagement. One was the old 'Monthly Review,'[3]

[1] January 24, 1830.
[2] 'Edinburgh Literary Journal,' February 13, 1830.
[3] February, 1830.

which was now approaching the end of the century of its existence. The article appearing in it was devoted to two favorites of the public, Letitia Landon and Robert Montgomery. That part of it directed against the latter attacked particularly the system of puffing him and his soaring Miltonic genius which it declared had been resorted to in order to bolster up his reputation and to increase the circulation of his works. In this matter it anticipated what Macaulay was to say somewhat later, and said it much more effectively. But 'The Monthly Review' was no longer what it was in the eighteenth century, a power in the land. A far more persistent and thoroughly abusive assailant was 'Fraser's Magazine' which had just been set on foot, and surpassed even 'Blackwood's' in the abounding vigor of its blackguardism. In its very first number, it fell foul of the poem of 'Satan.' "We have been bothered and stunned," it began, "with the brawling and braying of Arcadian nightingales in praise of the sacred poetry of young Montgomery." It was in this urbane way that the review opened and the remainder of the article was in accord with its beginning. From that time on for a series of years, few are the numbers of this liveliest and roughest of periodicals in which there was not some sneering reference to the work of Montgomery as a poet or to vituperation of him as a man. In one of them he was included with Bulwer and Alaric Watts—two favorite objects of aversion to the then conductors of the periodical—among "snakes, rats, and other vermin." On another occasion he was termed "Holy Bob," and in still another "a rhyming

monkey.'' To distinguish him from his veteran contemporary James Montgomery, he was christened 'Satan Montgomery'—and the name clung to him for a long series of years.

It was now the turn of the quarterlies. Of these the 'Westminster' first discussed the pretensions of the poet. Its review—which appeared in the number for April, 1830—remains the most entertaining of any produced, partly because it was the politest. It was the fashion of the day, it asserted, to make biography the work of friendship. Campbell writes the life of the painter Lawrence, Moore that of Lord Byron. Robert Montgomery, in accordance with this practice, naturally takes as his subject Satan. The orthodoxy of the 'Westminster' did not stand high, and there was in this criticism apparently something of that pitying feeling towards the arch-fiend which led the Christian father Origen to hope that the devil himself might at last be saved. ''As Milton,'' it continued, ''may be read in Heaven so this is precisely the book fit for Hades, and though we trust we hate the Enemy as vehemently as all good Christians ought to hate him, yet we own we wish him no worse than a patient perusal of this work to his honor. He will here bathe in a stream of molten lead.'' The criticism in the 'Quarterly' was delayed for some years. Even then it did not take the shape of a formal review but characteristically went out of its way to make a malignant personal attack upon Montgomery in a footnote which was fairly dragged into a notice of a fashionable novel.[1]

1 'Quarterly Review,' Vol. LII, p. 491, November, 1834.

The now far more noted article by Macaulay in the 'Edinburgh' needs the fuller consideration which is to be given later; for about it and the influence it exerted at the time of its appearance the most erroneous assertions still continue to be made.

But the enemies of Montgomery did not by any means have things all their own way. If he had his detractors, he had also his defenders and admirers. There were many of these, and several of the many were influential. This was true of both individuals and of the periodical press. Pamphlets were written in his favor attacking his critics and asserting in fullest sincerity that the author of 'Satan' was the coming man destined to occupy the throne of letters. These partisans of the past inveighed earnestly against the notoriously jealous criticism which, they declared, had sought to rob him of his reputation and the individual scurrility to which he had been subjected. There was ground, too, for their thinking lightly of the critical judgment of those who were foremost in decrying their idol. Rarely was the poetical taste of his depreciators so flawless that it behooved the reader to pay heed to the dicta they promulgated. They at times went into raptures over productions as marvellous and indisputable works of genius of which nobody knows now even the names. Criticism that could deal in vagaries of this sort was not likely to shake the confidence of even the uncritical admirers of Montgomery. Their belief, too, in his greatness was supported by the public of readers, or what for him was better, the public of purchasers. All the censure of

the poetry, all the vituperation of the man had not the slightest effect in retarding the sale of his work. One indeed gets the impression that they increased it. No writer of verse during the period of transition, and we might add during the whole period Montgomery lived, remotely rivalled him in popularity, so far as that is determined by the number of volumes sold. His works were brought out in collected editions. Selections from his poetry were made for the use of schools. Never has the powerlessness of critical attack been manifested more conspicuously. "Who doffed the lion's hide," asked loftily 'Fraser's Magazine' in 1831, "from Mountebank Montgomery and hung a calf-skin on his recreant limbs which he must wear forever?" But the very next year it was forced to confess the futility of its efforts. "Robert Montgomery's *Omnipresence of the Deity,*" it said in December, 1832, "has supplanted *Paradise Lost* in various academies in England. So much for the march of intellect."

Nor was Montgomery's literary activity checked in the slightest by the hostile criticism he received. For the years immediately following what might almost be called an organized assault on the part of the greater portion of the periodical press he continued to produce a number of poems, all of which were uniformly successful as regards their reception by the public. One of them entitled 'The Messiah' came out in May, 1832, "dedicated by permission to her Majesty the Queen." It was received with enthusiasm by his devotees. So rapid was the sale and so great was the demand that

the publishers were obliged to announce in the following month that a new edition would be brought out as soon as possible. Early in July they gave notice that it would be ready at a fixed date, and to obviate disappointment intending purchasers were requested to make immediate application for the work to their respective booksellers. In October followed the third edition, in August of the following year a fourth, and a little later a separate edition was advertised to be issued under the title of 'The Sacred Annual.' It was illustrated by colored and highly finished facsimiles of original pictures of the first excellence painted expressly for the purpose by the most distinguished living artists such as Etty, Martin, Haydon, Von Holst, and Maclise. This work, gorgeously bound and sold at a high price, led to a bestowal upon the poet of a medal by the Queen with her picture upon one side and that of the King upon the other. This was not the only instance of royal recognition which Montgomery received during his career. As late as 1849 another work of his, entitled 'The Christian Life, a Manual of Sacred Verse,' was published. It was "inscribed by express permission to her most gracious Majesty." This work, like 'The Messiah,' passed rapidly through several editions.

As might perhaps be expected, the attacks directed against Montgomery made as little impression upon him personally as they did upon the public. Had he weakly yielded to the hostile criticism he evoked, and had he been led to remain silent as subsequently was Tennyson, his repute as a writer of verse would have

speedily come to an ignominious close; for there was nothing in what he produced to impart to it vitality, outside of the immediate favor of the public. But he was not in the slightest degree affected by the critical storm which had burst upon his head. He was and continued to be serenely confident in his own greatness and had nothing but compassion or contempt for his detractors. As all the hostile criticism lavished upon his writings had not the slightest influence in lessening his popularity with the public, he felt justified in assuming an exultant and even a patronizing tone in dealing with his assailants. In the text of his poem of 'Oxford,' but more particularly in the notes, he commented on Macaulay in a way the latter apparently never forgave. He spoke of him as "the hired assassin of a bigoted review." A remark which strikes us now as deliciously absurd occurs at the end of one of his notes. "The reviewer," he said, "is, we believe, still alive; and from time to time employs himself in making mouths at distinguished men."

Montgomery indeed would have been a singular young writer if his head had not been turned by his sudden and extraordinary and continuous success. There is no doubt that his head was turned and that it never re-turned to a normal position. To a certain extent also he was justified by the estimate of various persons in the opinion he entertained of himself. The admiration he excited was by no means confined to the members of the vast multitude who are numbered but not weighed, though it was in its ranks that his poetry had mainly its circulation. Some of the

periodicals which celebrated his merits occupied a high position in the critical world. Several of the persons who stood up for him were men of letters whose names carried respect anywhere and everywhere. Sharon Turner and William Lisle Bowles were from the outset his friends and patrons. Southey, while not joining in the unmeasured laudation heaped upon him, had no mean opinion of his abilities and achievements. Nor was Wordsworth's estimate unfavorable. He had read, he wrote to Montgomery, 'The Omnipresence of the Deity' with much pleasure, and while recognizing its faults, he saw also in the work indication of future excellence. Those who are familiar with the somewhat ponderous history of Europe written by Sir Archibald Alison may recall that in one place he mentions "the noble poem of Satan."

But no measured and lukewarm praise of this sort would have satisfied the feelings of his partisans. They looked upon Montgomery as a mighty intellectual luminary that had suddenly blazed forth with a splendor all its own. It was with them no unusual subject of congratulation that he had come to take the place made vacant by the death of Byron. As the latter author had in their opinion given up his great gifts to the service of the devil, they felt that his evil influence should be counteracted by furnishing the fullest development to the powers of another author, equal if not greater, who was possessed not only of genius but of piety, and was furthermore disposed to devote himself to the service of the Lord. Accord-

ingly measures were taken by certain of his admirers—among whom were two of the earliest sponsors of his reputation, Sharon Turner and William Lisle Bowles—to have his education continued and completed. In February, 1830, he was matriculated at Lincoln College, Oxford, and in 1833 received the degree of A. B. He entered the church. Though he never gave up to the end of his life the production of poetry, he was largely diverted from its composition by the duties of the new calling he had chosen. Yet not one of the works he subsequently brought out failed to meet with favor from the public of purchasers. Nor did the sale of the poems which had previously appeared fall off while his life lasted, or even somewhat later. In 1841 appeared, for instance, the twenty-first edition of 'The Omnipresence of the Deity,' in 1849, the twenty-fifth. In the catalogue of the British Museum is the twenty-eighth, and it bears the date of 1858, three years after its author's death.

Full as remarkable too was his success in the new calling he had chosen. After filling the pulpit successfully in two provincial cities, he came to London in 1843 as the minister of Percy Chapel in the parish of Saint Pancras. There he officiated the rest of his life. Wherever he was, he seems to have been as popular as a preacher of sermons as he was as a writer of verse. There is a striking comment on this fact in a letter from Miss Barrett to Richard Hengist Horne. "Are you aware, O Orion," she wrote, "that the most popular poet alive is the Reverend Robert Montgomery, who walks into his twenty and somethingth

edition 'like nothing'? I mean the author of 'Satan,' 'Woman,' 'Omnipresence of the Deity,' 'The Messiah'; the least of these being in its teens of editions, and the greatest not worth a bark of my Flushie's. . . . But is it not wonderful that this man who waves his white handkerchief from the pulpit till the tears run in rivulets all round, should have another trick of oratory (as good) where he can't show the ring on his little finger? I really do believe that the 'Omnipresence of the Deity' is in the twenty-fourth edition, or beyond it,—a fact that cannot be stated in respect to Wordsworth after all these years.'"[1]

Yet in spite of the phenomenal favor of the reading public which waited upon Montgomery from the very beginning of his literary career to the very end of his life, his name would have disappeared as utterly from the knowledge of all men as it has from that of most, had it not been preserved in a sort of quasi-vitality by an attack in 'The Edinburgh Review' intended to crush him entirely. This was the criticism by Macaulay. Had it not been for that article, both the man and his work would have passed away as completely from human memory as have the names and works of several others who have attained to something like the same temporary popularity but who have dropped quietly into the oblivion which sooner or later waits upon all inferior production, though encountering no assault from any quarter carrying weight. Of the innumerable attacks made upon Montgomery this is

[1] 'Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, addressed to Richard Hengist Horne,' 1877, Vol. I, pp. 91-92.

the single one which has survived; and it has survived not because of its merits but because it has been included in the collected edition of the author's essays. It is the popularity of these other writings which have given to it a reputation for effectiveness which it did not have at that time and never deserved at any time. Of itself it had no claim to be reprinted. It is not merely inferior to most of the other similar but now forgotten attacks which had previously been published, it is so unfair in its criticism and so misleading in its statements as to be discreditable to its author. Macaulay to be sure, in writing it, was actuated by the noblest of motives—at least he tells us so. They are given in a letter sent by him in March, 1830, to the editor of 'The Edinburgh Review.' "There is," he said, "a wretched poetaster of the name of Robert Montgomery, who has written some volumes of detestable verses on religious subjects, which, by mere puffing in magazines and newspapers, have had an immense sale. . . . I have for some time past thought that the trick of puffing, as it is now practised both by authors and publishers, is likely to degrade the literary character, and to deprave the public taste in a frightful degree."[1] It was high time, he thought, to purify literature by exposing the methods by which worthless works succeeded in securing an extensive circulation. He therefore suggested that an attempt should be made to try what effect satire would have upon this nuisance. Accordingly in the April number of 'The

[1] Macvey Napier's 'Correspondence,' 1879, pp. 79-80.

Edinburgh Review"[1]—which however did not come out till the latter part of May—Macaulay set out to purify the public taste in an article entitled 'Mr. Robert Montgomery's *Poems* and the Modern Practice of Puffing.'

A temporate protest against the absurd estimate which had been expressed in numerous quarters of Montgomery's poetic achievement would not have been out of place, if it were deemed desirable to write anything at all about works which were destined ultimately to sink of themselves into oblivion. But such a protest was not likely to come from that quarter. Macaulay's article, as was to be expected, was marked by his usual exaggerated emphasis. But what was much worse, it was disfigured by a series of misstatements of the methods which had been followed in this case both by author and publisher. His line of reasoning, or rather of assertion, to account for Montgomery's extraordinary success ran essentially to the following effect. Men of letters had once been wont to court the favor of patrons by flattery. Now they sought to gain the favor of the public by means of puffing. He set out to show the various ways in which this nefarious practice of foisting candidates upon the favor of readers was carried on. It was primarily a sort of conspiracy between authors and publishers. By various devices duly enumerated they sought to gull the public. As the best illustration of the practice generally employed at that time he selected the writings of Robert Montgomery "because

[1] Vol. LI, pp. 193-210.

his works have received more enthusiastic praise, and have deserved more unmixed contempt, than any which, as far as our knowledge extends, have appeared within the last three or four years." He then proceeded to select extracts from the two poems under review—'The Omnipresence of the Deity' and 'Satan'—to confirm the truth of his assertions. He somewhat grandiloquently closed his article with the declaration that if his remarks gave pain to Mr. Robert Montgomery he was sorry for it; but at whatever cost of pain to individuals literature must be purified from this taint of puffing. Not to be outdone in generosity, Montgomery, in his comments upon this review in the notes to his poem of 'Oxford,' expressed regret if his remarks should cause Macaulay any suffering.

Literature in the long run can safely be left to take care of itself. To whatever cause Montgomery's success is to be attributed, the reasons given for it by Macaulay had not the slightest foundation in fact, so far as this poet was concerned, even were they true in the case of other writers. His publisher, Samuel Maunder, himself a compiler of educational works, was, if all accessible information can be trusted, a man of upright character. Furthermore, while he was a respectable, he was far from being an influential man in his profession. Naturally he felt outraged by the charges and insinuations which had been brought against him from various quarters; in particular that Montgomery's popularity was due to skilful and persistent puffing on his part, carefully planned and

diligently carried out. He speedily made an indignant and effective reply in an 'Address to the Public."[1] It was evidently aimed mainly at Macaulay; but he neglected none of the various accusations which had been preferred by other critics. He began with the assertion that the most illiberal attacks had of late been repeatedly directed against him by certain reviewers, who in their zeal to destroy the popularity of Montgomery and in their attempts to account for the extensive sale of his poems had charged his publisher with having unduly raised that author into general favor by a system of puffing. He then took up the consideration of the various statements which had been specifically set forth to sustain this accusation.

The system of puffing, Maunder observed, had been defined as resting on four grounds. First, the publisher had his own review. Secondly, he exchanged favors with other reviews. Thirdly, he influenced public opinion through the agency of literary coteries. Fourthly, he bribed the periodical press. All these, he declared to be, so far as he was concerned, "a deliberate and malicious calumny." The proof of this fact which he gave was overwhelmingly conclusive. First, he said he had no review of his own. Consequently he could not exchange favors with other reviews, and should disdain to do so if he could. He furthermore had no connection with any coterie. As to the final charge, he remarked that he had no money to bribe periodicals with, assuming that they could be bribed, which he did not believe. He said indeed

1 'Literary Gazette,' August 14, 1830, p. 534.

specifically with some heat that he had "never bribed, or paid, or offered to pay, any individual connected with the periodical press, to praise the works of Mr. Montgomery, or any other works" in which he had an interest. That any reputable or influential periodical was open to such inducements to sell its praise or blame was to him in truth inconceivable. In conclusion, he denounced as a gross abuse of criticism the attempt which had been made to damage his property and impugn his conduct on grounds, which, to use his own words, were "at once malicious, scandalous, and false." Macaulay as one of the assailants was wise enough but also disingenuous enough to take advantage of his position in life never to reply to the exposure of his unsupported accusation. But he never withdrew it: in fact, by reprinting this article in his collected essays, he may be said to have reaffirmed it.

There was hardly need for any protest on the part of the publisher in the eyes of any fair-minded person acquainted with the facts. Here was a young man who had barely reached his majority. He was a dweller in a provincial city. He was of mean, not to say base parentage. When he produced his first works he had none of the advantages of university training or association. He had no connection with men of influence, no interest with them beyond what their personal opinion of his abilities might excite. His publisher was equally powerless to help him forward in his career. To this new aspirant belonged not a single one of the external agencies which aid an author

in the first instance to rise, many of which were conspicuously present in the case of his most virulent assailants. Yet his first religious poem was received with enthusiastic acclaim by a body of professional critics, few if any of whom could have known him personally, or even have heard of him; or if they knew of him, what they knew had not been of a nature to lead them to think of him favorably. The mere recital of these facts proves the utter groundlessness of Macaulay's assertions. It is hardly necessary to add that his criticism, like those which preceded it and followed it, had not the slightest influence in purifying literature, so far as that was to be accomplished by destroying the continued sale of Montgomery's works. It did not hasten a single moment the approach of that oblivion which was sure to overtake them eventually. It was not till the subject of his criticism had been for some time in his grave and even his name forgotten that this review by Macaulay was given credit for a destruction which it never had the slightest effect in bringing about.

The names of some of those who believed seriously in Montgomery as a poet have been given, not because a favorable verdict on their part necessarily implies desert, but because it does show that there was somewhere a real foundation for his popularity; that it was no mere creation of the engineering of puffing set in motion by the author or his publisher. Still it remains a legitimate subject of inquiry what was it that led to this extraordinary and prolonged success. A cursory examination of the poems will show that they

abound in commonplace thoughts set forth in pompous phraseology; that the epithets are sometimes meaningless, sometimes inappropriate; that the lines are interspersed with unknown words, apparently the coinage of the author himself; that there is no central unity in the treatment of the theme, but that the whole is made up of a series of detached passages which could have been omitted altogether or could have been extended indefinitely, without in the slightest degree interfering with the development of the plot, whose parts have not the cohesion of orderly growth, but the adhesion of accidental suggestion, and were as appropriate to one subject as to another. On the other hand, it is fair to say that Montgomery had been a diligent student of Dryden, Pope, and Goldsmith, and had learned to reproduce certain characteristics of their style with a good deal of cleverness. This trick of expression caught no small number of those who do not detect easily the difference between an imitation and an original. With all his verbiage, too, there was occasionally rhetorical pomp; and while his ideas were commonplace, they were sometimes expressed in a striking way. His verse too was smooth, and as Dryden said of Settle's, it had a blundering kind of melody. Furthermore, what in later life added to his popularity was the excellence of his private life and the good which in many ways he accomplished. One is too often compelled to regret that individuals who intellectually are worthy of contempt will persist in being morally in the highest degree praiseworthy.

Still, if we can confidently say that this phenomenal

success—not the passing popularity of a day but extending over a lifetime—was not due to the agency imputed, to what shall it be attributed? The question is much easier to ask than to answer. Who can explain the immense sale of works of fiction in one generation of which the next generation knows nothing at all, or if it knows despises? Yet in the case of Montgomery's productions there is one factor which will account in a measure for their warm reception by a certain portion of the public. This is the same agency that has caused the temporary success in the past of several works of a similar or an allied nature, and will cause the like success of others in the future. It is the appeal they make to a particular class of readers. They all treat of moral or religious topics. The subjects upon which Montgomery wrote are important in any view; to a large body of men they will always be of supreme importance. It is hard for a certain class of even well-educated persons, with ample opportunities for observation, to comprehend the fact; but there are no questions which appeal to so vast a multitude as those which treat directly or remotely of the relations of man to his Maker, and of the thousand and one matters of inquiry and discussion which concern the moral government of the universe. The interest they take in the theme not only attracts their attention to works dealing with it, but blunts distinctly the literary sense. By nothing are even able judges so easily imposed upon as by religious poetry, if they themselves are religiously inclined. They are disposed to accord exceptional ability to the writer who expresses in any

new or striking way opinions which they hold or feelings with which they sympathize. It is in truth a singular fact that the moment any poem treats of the truths of religion in a tone indicative of fervent piety, the critical power of many intelligent men deserts them at once. When they find spirituality of sentiment they are easily led to believe in the existence of literary inspiration. The good fortune thus resulting has fallen to the lot of several writers, and it fell to Montgomery on a grand scale.

If feelings of this sort be occasionally true of persons of superior intellectual powers, how much truer are they of that immense body of serious men who, possessing limited literary taste, are insensible to high literary art, but who have ever before their eyes lofty moral and religious standards. Any production which tends to strengthen the hold of these is to them for that very reason attractive. If in addition they get the impression that it is literature in the high sense of the word, they have the satisfaction of feeling that not only is their spiritual nature elevated but their intellectual nature enriched. No composition of any sort will excite more general interest than under favoring circumstances does sacred poetry; for there is nothing a large share of the English-speaking race enjoy more keenly than being preached to. This feeling naturally shows itself in their attitude towards literature or what they consider literature. For them all other pleasures pale beside the reading of platitudes seasoned with morality and religion and garnished with the ornament of verse. To them is due

the immense sale of works which have little to recommend them but the goodness or rather goodiness of the sentiments they convey. They honestly believe that they are appreciating fine poetry when they are simply listening with devout attention to commonplace preaching. To this far from limited class of persons Montgomery's writings were addressed. What jarred upon the feelings of men of highly cultivated literary taste was not to them in the slightest degree offensive. On the contrary it was often attractive. Still if the critics could not affect Montgomery's repute seriously with his contemporaries they have had their way with their descendants. They have succeeded in maintaining after his death the distinction which they set up during his life. In the new 'Dictionary of National Biography' several of these writers, whom no one ever reads now or has even heard of, are characterized as poets, while Montgomery himself is put down as a poetaster.

The same fondness for cheap moral commonplace manifested itself in the Victorian period in the success which waited upon a book which was brought out a little later—more precisely speaking, towards the end of the fourth decade. In spite of its great sale in England, Montgomery's poetry had but little circulation in America. Not so with the 'Proverbial Philosophy' of Martin Farquhar Tupper, the first series of which appeared in 1838. Though taking nominally the form of verse it was not essentially different in its subject or its fortune from a prose treatise which came out nearly a century before.

This was Robert Dodsley's 'The Œconomy of Human Life,' which purported to be a translation from a Brahman manuscript. The imputed origin distinctly added to the favor it met; for there has always been a general feeling among the Western nations that wisdom resembles the sun in having its rise in the East. But what contributed even more to its immediate success was the report which seems to have been carefully fostered at the outset that the author of the work was Lord Chesterfield. At that time his name would sell anything. But without these agencies it would have achieved popularity; for it was made up of that cheap sort of moralizing which is peculiarly dear to the Anglo-Saxon heart. Though nothing more utterly commonplace was ever produced the work went through edition after edition during the eighteenth century and even later. This success was more than repeated during the nineteenth century by the 'Proverbial Philosophy' of Tupper. The circulation of the work was enormous in England; it was even greater in America. Before a half-century had gone by, hundreds of thousands of copies had been disposed of in the two countries. It is a somewhat striking fact that the three writers just mentioned met with such amazing success in the middle of the nineteenth century, so far as that is indicated by the sale of their works. It is as striking a fact that they are now scarcely known at all, or if spoken of are usually spoken of with derision.

CHAPTER VII

THE POEMS OF 1830

Tennyson's prize poem had appeared in 1829. It was in the year following that the two brothers, who had brought out their first volume conjointly, appealed separately to the public. On the fourteenth of March appeared at Cambridge a volume of Charles Tennyson's, entitled 'Sonnets and Fugitive Pieces.' About three months later—towards the end of June—was published at London by Effingham Wilson, Alfred's volume of 'Poems, Chiefly Lyrical.' It had been the original intention to have his productions come out in conjunction with those of Arthur Hallam. The poems of the latter were set up and a few copies were printed and distributed among his friends. But Hallam's father preferred—very wisely preferred—that his son's pieces should be withheld from publication. Accordingly Tennyson's poems were published by themselves.

When this volume came out, Tennyson was still a minor. Attention has been called more than once to the fact that he had been early hailed by the little circle to which he belonged at Cambridge as the coming man. Notes and diaries of the men of that time have been preserved and printed. They are singularly unanimous in the tribute of admiration they pay to

what they conceive to be the greatness of Tennyson and of his assured eminence in the future. But it was something more than the mere praise of a private circle that certain of his admirers sought for him now. They began at once an active propaganda to spread his fame far and wide. Naturally among these Arthur Hallam was foremost. Early the following year he forwarded the volumes of the two brothers to Leigh Hunt. That author had started in September, 1830, a daily journal called 'The Tatler.' It was devoted almost exclusively to literature and the drama. In his letter Hallam declared that Tennyson was the true heir to the kingdom of Parnassus, the throne of which had been vacant since the death of Keats. "I flatter myself," he wrote of the volume, "you will, if you peruse that book, be surprised and delighted to find a new prophet of those true principles of Art"—it was Art with a capital letter—"which in this country you were among the first to recommend both by precept and example." He repeated the remarks which by that time had become habitual with all dealers in doubtful poetical wares, that neither of the two poets, whose volumes he had forwarded, was likely to become extensively or immediately popular. They did not appeal to the world at large, which was known to abound in all evil, especially that of bad taste. They addressed on the contrary—here follow Hallam's exact words—"the elect Church of Urania, which we know to be small and in tribulation. Now in this church," he continued, "you have preferment, and what you preach will be considered by the faithful

as a sound form of words." It was inevitable that the request should follow to which this preliminary flattery had paved the way. "If you agree," he added, "you will not perhaps object to mentioning them favorably in the Tatler."[1]

In his letter to Hunt, Hallam called also attention to a criticism of Tennyson's poems which had appeared in 'The Westminster Review' for January, 1831. He attributed the authorship of it to Bowring who was the editor of the periodical. But he was not certain of it. There seems no sufficient reason to believe the ascription to be true and a good deal to think it to be false. Certainly it is to be hoped so, for the editor's own sake. It is enough to have to endure the responsibility of having admitted the article into the 'Review' without being compelled to bear the additional burden of having written it. Never were more absurd general views on poetry combined with more absurd special criticism. It justified all the abuse Christopher North subsequently heaped upon it, though not the way in which that was expressed.

The article in the 'Westminster' was couched throughout in language which it would be weak to call laudatory. Considering the fact that if Tennyson's reputation had to rest on the volume of 1830, he would hardly be regarded as a poet of the third-rate order, it is difficult not to believe that the criticism contained in this review came from the partiality of personal friendship acting either directly or indirectly. If not

[1] Letter of January 11, 1831, in J. Nichols's 'Literary Anecdotes of the Nineteenth Century,' Vol. I, p. 25.

due to that, there was displayed a power of foreseeing the future not often granted to the acutest of critics. For there was no moderation in the expression of the praise. A great poet had arisen, at least a person possessed of great poetical power; and to the proper direction of that power the reviewer professed to look with anxiety. All this might be forgiven to the enthusiasm of personal affection. What is unpardonable is the hopeless imbecility of the views set forth. "The great principle of human improvement," it declared, "is at work in poetry as well as everywhere else." Such was the thesis maintained and illustrated. Criminal jurisprudence, we were told, was in the way of being reformed; light was about to be shed over legislation; religion was becoming purified; arts and sciences were made more available for human comfort. All this was due to the ever growing acquaintance that was going on with the philosophy of mind and of man, and to the increasing facility with which that philosophy was applied. Of course, it would be a pity if poetry were an exception to this great law of progression in human affairs. It was no exception. This law of progression it is, said the prophetic reviewer, that will secure also a succession of creations out of the unbounded and everlasting material of poetry. "The machinery of a poem," he went on to assert, "is not less susceptible of improvement than the machinery of a cotton-mill; nor is there any better reason why the one should retrograde from the days of Milton, than the other from those of Arkwright."

This is certainly a comfortable doctrine. It occasionally crops out in the history of criticism. Unfortunately it is never exemplified in the works with which criticism concerns itself. Of machine poetry the remarks of the reviewer may be true; but hardly of the poetry of genius. With that the law of progression does not operate. Homer died fully three thousand years ago; that is, if he ever lived at all. Virgil flourished about two thousand years ago. Yet the world has not yet seen any marked improvement upon the method these two poets followed and the results they obtained. Shakespeare was writing dramas more than three hundred years ago. So far, not alone in England, but in all the countries of Europe, no plays have been brought to the attention of mankind which indicate a marked advance upon what he accomplished. That there will be variations in the form and fashion and creeds of poetry at different periods may be very likely; for the tastes and standards of one generation are not necessarily the tastes and standards of another. In consequence, men often think they have improved when they have merely changed. But genius has no past. It recognizes no law of progression. Certain conditions there may be essential to its birth and development. But these once given, it is independent of time and place and circumstance. It starts into life perfectly formed.

This, however, was not the opinion of the 'Westminster' reviewer. He not only praised the philosophical character of the poems of Tennyson, he was confident that they would be the precursors of a series of

productions which would beautifully illustrate his speculations and convincingly prove their soundness. In order to sustain this forecast of the future he heaped eulogy after eulogy upon individual pieces. The author, he said, had the secret of the transmigration of the soul. He could cast his own spirit into anything, real or imaginary. Scarcely Vishnu himself became incarnate more easily, frequently, or perfectly. Two of the poems—'Nothing will Die' and 'All Things will Die'—the reviewer contrasted with 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso.' He pronounced no opinion upon the comparative merits of the execution of these four, but he assured us that there is not less truth and perhaps a more refined observation in the point of view from which the subjects had been approached by the modern poet. As Tennyson himself in the edition of 1842 suppressed these two particular pieces, it is evident that he himself was not so struck by their superiority to Milton's as had been his reviewer. The amatory poems, the critic further remarked, are expressions "not of heartless sensuality, nor of a sickly refinement, nor of fantastic devotion, but of manly love." They illustrate, too, he told us, the philosophy of the passion, while they exhibit the various phases of its existence and embody its power. In his observations on the pictures of women as shown in the characterizations of Claribel, Lilian, Isabel, Madeline, and Adeline, he set no bounds to the display of his ecstatic admiration. "His portraits," he wrote, "are delicate, his likenesses (we will answer for them) perfect, and they have life, character, and

individuality.'' The phrase in parentheses seems to imply that these were real beings who were described, and that the persons meant were known to the reviewer. Though this is a natural interpretation, no confidence can be felt in any conclusions drawn from the language of an almost crazy panegyrist, and Tennyson himself denied any individual reference. In fact, no fault was found with anything contained in the volume, save a faint objection to the occasional irregularities of the measure and the use of antiquated words and obsolete expressions.

Leigh Hunt in his turn responded at once to the suggestions which had been thrown out by Hallam. Four articles he wrote upon the poems of the brothers. Two of them appeared in the numbers of 'The Tatler' for February 24 and 26, 1831, and two in the numbers for March 1 and 3. The former were devoted mainly to Alfred Tennyson, the latter to Charles. He hailed them both as great coming poets. However well the prophecy has been fulfilled in the case of the one, it can hardly be called a successful prediction in the case of the other. ''We have great pleasure,'' he wrote, ''in stating that we have seen no such poetical writing since the last volume of Mr. Keats; and that the authors, who are both young men, we believe at college, may take their stand at once among the first poets of the day.'' It is an interesting commentary upon the character of these productions that this experienced critic found it difficult to decide as to the comparative merits of the two brothers. He asserted that he could not make up his mind which of them was the

better. It is evident, however, that his preference finally went to Alfred, and that the feeling of his superiority grew upon him as he continued the examination of the respective volumes. It ought, however, to be added in all fairness that he had been assisted in reaching this point of view by Hallam. In his letter Hallam had said that while the work of Charles Tennyson showed a mind capable of noble sentiments, it was inferior in depth and range of thought to his brother's. This it very certainly was.

But unlike the 'Westminster' reviewer, Leigh Hunt's criticism was no unmixed laudation. He singled out pieces for blame as well as for praise. To one who is still innocent enough to put faith in the criticism of assumed or presumed literary experts, it will come as something of a shock to discover that the poem entitled 'Recollections of the Arabian Nights,' a few months later to be highly celebrated by Christopher North, met with little favor at Hunt's hands. He agreed, however, with the Scotch critic in having little patience with what may be called the patriotic poems. The 'National Song,' in particular, he condemned unsparingly. "We hold the National Song to be naught," he wrote. This was letting it off easily. There was certainly ample justification for the view he took of this little song, which, after suppression in later editions, Tennyson revived in 1892 in the play of 'The Foresters.' There it fits more appropriately the mouth of the performers. In them the braggart character pervading it is not so offensive under the circumstances as it is in the song taken by itself. Patriotism

is a good thing in its place; but no excess of it can enrich poetry which is itself nothing but commonplace: while the patriotism in turn is rendered cheap by the inadequacy of the words to express the feelings which are entertained. The excited passions of the moment occasionally impart to pieces of this character a sort of vitality, which subsequent perusal in a different state of mind shows to be wholly unjustifiable. Later in his career Tennyson's intense national feeling lifted him at times into an atmosphere of high poetical achievement. 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' will live far longer in his verse than on the pages of any historian. But too generally and in his early writings particularly, his patriotic utterances reach a height little above the vaporings of the commonplace man and manifest a spirit hardly creditable to the prejudices of the narrow man.

Leigh Hunt, in awarding the superiority on the whole to Alfred, gave expression to the opinion generally entertained by the best judges. That, too, accorded likewise with the estimate widely held in the circle of personal friends who surrounded the two brothers. Still, among them no confident tone was assumed in this matter. A dissenting opinion came, too, from quarters presumably carrying great weight. There was no recognition of Alfred's pre-eminence on the part of the two chief living poets. They awarded the palm to the elder. Wordsworth was at Cambridge in November, 1830. In a letter he wrote from there he bore witness to the local reputation of both the authors who had come out that year in print. "We have," he

said, "also a respectable show of blossom in poetry—two brothers of the name of Tennyson, one in particular not a little promising."[1] There is nothing in these words to indicate which of the brothers the veteran writer had in mind. From subsequent revelations, however, it is clear that it was Charles. In March, 1848, Emerson called upon Wordsworth at Rydal Mount. In the course of the conversation the latter told him that "he had thought an elder brother of Tennyson at first the better poet, but must now reckon Alfred the true one."[2]

The same belief in the superiority of Charles to Alfred seems to have been taken by Coleridge. Written record of his opinions of the work of the former has been left behind in comments on the sonnets contained in a copy of the volume of the elder brother, which is preserved in the British Museum. He expressed much admiration for these sonnets generally and special admiration for several of them, mingled with specific criticism of words and lines. That entitled 'To a Lark' he declared to be one of the best in the language. He spoke of another, and indeed of a large proportion of them as standing "between Wordsworth and Southey and partaking of the excellencies of both." There was nothing in the work to justify this overstrained laudation, though it would not have been hard to rival Southey's efforts in this kind. Coleridge's commendation of them is just as valuable as his glorification of the poems of William Lisle Bowles, by

[1] W. Knight's 'Wordsworth,' Vol. III, p. 188.
[2] 'English Traits,' Chap. XVII.

whose sonnets in particular he tells us that he was for years "enthusiastically delighted and inspired." His further individual censures of words and phrases have now lost their point, if indeed they had any in the first instance. Still, praise from such a presumed authoritative source was valued highly. John Kemble wrote to his sister that Coleridge had expressed the highest admiration for the sonnets of Charles Tennyson.[1] "The old man of Highgate has rejoiced over him," wrote Hallam also to Emily Tennyson.[2] Unfortunately very few others rejoiced. His volume of sonnets seems to have fallen dead from the press. The only notice it received, so far as I can discover, is that of Leigh Hunt's which has already been given. One's faith in critical dicta suffers indeed a rude shock to find two of the greatest poets of the time expressing a preference for mild commonplace with occasional gleams of felicity over genuine originality, crude and undeveloped as it then was.

It is undoubtedly easy enough to be wise after the event. Yet, however differently it may have appeared then to Wordsworth and Coleridge, the modern reader has no more difficulty in recognizing the superiority of Alfred to Charles in their respective volumes of 1830 than he has in recognizing the same superiority in their respective contributions to the collection, entitled 'Poems by Two Brothers.' Such was manifestly the sentiment pervading at the time the circle surrounding the two Tennysons at Cambridge. It

[1] 'Biographia Literaria,' Chap. I.
[2] 'Memoir,' Vol. I, p. 75.

represented the attitude of the general public. The sonnets of Charles encountered indeed both then and at later periods what was far worse than hostile criticism. They were not spoken of at all. It is pretty certain indeed that the reception his first volume met from the public did not tempt him to try his fortunes speedily again. The life he led was henceforward a somewhat uneventful one; in some respects it must have been a disappointing one. He entered the ministry, and in 1835 became curate of Tealby, in his native county. His choice of profession excited the regret of Leigh Hunt. "I was fearful of what he would come to," he wrote to a friend, "by certain misgivings in his poetry and a want of the active poetic faith."[1] It was probably not so much a want of active poetic faith—whatever Hunt meant by that expression—that decided his career, as his growing consciousness of his want of poetic ability. After two years of his Tealby curacy he became vicar of Grasby, a lonely village about three miles northwest of Caistor. His uncle, Samuel Turner, was a resident of this last-named place. By the will of this kinsman, he became heir to an income of five hundred pounds a year, on condition that he should change his name from Charles Tennyson to Charles Turner. This he did. On May 24, 1836,[2] he was married at Horncastle to Louisa Sellwood, the youngest sister of the future wife of his younger brother. According to one report, a separation speedily followed; but in 1849 the couple came

[1] 'Memoir,' Vol. I, p. 164.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 148.

together again, after having lived apart for over a dozen years.[1]

More than a third of a century passed before Charles Tennyson published another volume of verse. It could not have been the overshadowing success of his younger brother which led him to maintain silence. As we shall see, that success was deferred for a long time. It is much more likely that it was the loftiness of position which his brother had won that later led him to come again before the public. In 1864 appeared a volume of nearly one hundred sonnets with a dedication to Alfred Tennyson prefixed. Additional volumes followed in 1868 and in 1873. After his death in 1879 his poetical works were collected and brought out in 1880 in a single volume. They were accompanied by an introductory essay of James Spedding, which had appeared in a periodical the previous September.[2] It was a most fervent eulogy both of the man and of the poet, though it is manifest that the polemic sonnets did not appeal to this most kindly of critics either for the spirit characterizing them or for their argumentative force. Of the others, however, he thought highly. Spedding indeed predicted that many of these "inspired strains," would probably "take place hereafter . . . among the memorable utterances of our time." He further spoke of the author as one among the candidates for immortality who "is entitled to a high place." The lifetime of a generation has gone by since these forecasts of the future were made. So

1 'The Journal of Walter White,' 1898, p. 142.
2 'Nineteenth Century,' September, 1879.

far the verdict of posterity has failed to confirm the opinion of the reviewer. There is every indication that whatever repute Charles Tennyson may come to have in the future will be due to his brother and not to himself.

As regards his career as an author, it was the fortune or misfortune of Charles to give himself up almost entirely to the production of sonnets; and he who chooses to cultivate that field of poetical composition may well make up his mind in advance to leave all hope behind. After nearly a hundred years of intermission this form of verse came once more into vogue in the early part of the second half of the eighteenth century. Resort to the use of it steadily increased after it had once been introduced or rather reintroduced. From the beginning of the nineteenth century up to the present time addiction to it has raged with extreme violence; never probably more so than now. Perhaps no other form of verse has been for a long time so generally employed. Many certainly have been and still are laborers in the field; scanty is the harvest of value which has been produced. The reason is plain enough. The sonnet is the Procrustean bed of poetry. It is a purely artificial form of verse. It has a precise number of lines, it has a precise number of feet to the line. The expression of the thought may demand more space. That cannot be granted; it must be cut off. More often the thought could be better expressed in fewer words. That, too, cannot be allowed. It must be stretched out to fill up the specified number of lines. Add to this, that nearly all mod-

ern producers of sonnets conform to the further requirements of a limited number of rhymes and of their precise arrangement. In a language so deficient as is the English in words having correspondence of sound, this fact lends additional difficulty to the task of their composition. "What do they seem fit for," wrote FitzGerald to Frederick Tennyson, "but to serve as little shapes in which a man may mould very mechanically any single thought which comes into his head, which thought is not lyrical enough in itself to exhale in a more lyrical measure? The difficulty of the sonnet meter in English is a good excuse for the dull didactic thoughts which naturally incline towards it; fellows know there is no danger of decanting their muddy stuff ever so slowly; they are neither prose nor poetry.'"[1]

It is no wonder in consequence that the results, even with those who are regarded as having succeeded, bear but a small proportion to the labor put forth. In modern times, Wordsworth, of the great poets, has been the most successful cultivator of the sonnet. With his tendency to diffuseness its enforced compression proved often a distinct advantage. Yet it is perfectly safe to say that his fame in this particular rests upon fewer than half a hundred of these productions. All the rest could be dropped from his works without his reputation suffering a tithe of loss, though he wrote in all nearly four hundred pieces of this character. Him as regards number Charles Tennyson rivalled. His sonnets as found in the final volume just men-

[1] E. FitzGerald's 'Letters and Literary Remains,' Vol. I, p. 73.

tioned lack one of reaching three hundred and fifty. Many of them are marked by a certain plaintiveness and tenderness of expression; some of them contain fine lines, a few of them fine passages; but there is not one of them which, as a whole, possesses distinction; and a sonnet without distinction has no ground for existing at all. As regards their content, too, no small number of the later sonnets were deformed by a polemic spirit which is characteristic of critical activity rather than of creative. Agnostics and believers in the higher criticism generally met with little mercy at the hands of this clerical dweller of the Lincolnshire wolds. Subjects of such a nature it requires genius of the highest order to lift out of the region of controversy into that of poetry; and genius of even a high sort Charles Tennyson did not possess. All of the sonnets taken together are hardly equal in value to 'At Midnight,' the prefatory poem to the volume containing them, which his brother wrote on June 30, 1879.

Not such, however, was the belief of Alfred Tennyson. He ranked a few of his brother's sonnets as being among the noblest in the language. He declared them to be "wonderful." "I sometimes think," he said on one occasion, "that, of their kind, there is nothing equal to them in English poetry."[1] Nor was he altogether singular in this view. Henry Taylor thought that Burns had not written anything worthy to live twenty years; that ninety-nine per cent of his production was worthless, and that nothing of it was

[1] H. D. Rawnsley's 'Memories of the Tennysons,' p. 101.

of such excellence as to found a poet's fame.[1] But he made up for his lack of appreciation of the Scotch writer by his enthusiasm for the sonnets of Charles Tennyson. "There are none in the language," he said, "more beautiful in their sincerity and truth."[2] The general opinion as reflected by their popularity and sale accords rather with the opinion expressed by the Brownings who considered Frederick Tennyson, though not a great poet, to be a distinctly better one than Charles. This conforms little, as we have seen, with Alfred's estimate. He put these sonnets below those only of Milton, Shakespeare, and Wordsworth. "I at least," he said to a visitor, "rank my brother's next to those by the three Olympians."[3] The rest of the world may respect the feeling which dictated this verdict of fraternal affection. Individuals may be found to concur with it; but it is fairly safe to say that it will never become a widely accepted view.

Hallam's efforts in behalf of the younger brother did not cease with his letter to Hunt. In April, 1830, a new monthly had been started by a London firm under the title of 'The Englishman's Magazine.' After the fourth number it passed into the hands of Moxon, the future publisher of so many poets. He put forth strenuous exertions for its success. He called to its aid all the authors he could command who had already acquired reputation or gave promise of acquiring it. The very first number which bore his

[1] 'Correspondence of Henry Taylor,' 1888, p. 188.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 287.
[3] W. A. Knight's 'Retrospects,' 1904, p. 49.

imprint—that for August—numbered among its contributors, Charles Lamb, Motherwell, Hood, Miss Mitford, Leigh Hunt, Gerald Griffin, and several other writers more or less prominent at the time. But though generally well spoken of, the undertaking did not succeed. An ominous advertisement, which appeared early in October, to the effect that two shareholders were wanted for the periodical, indicated that its fortunes were not on a secure basis. The two shareholders sought for apparently refrained from putting in an appearance. Accordingly after the issue for October the publisher decided to discontinue the magazine.

To this first of the three numbers which appeared under Moxon's management—that of August—Hallam contributed an article. It was entitled 'On Some of the Characteristics of Modern Poetry and on the Lyrical Poems of Alfred Tennyson.' At the time he complained to a friend that it was "so execrably printed that every line contains an error, and these not always palpable."[1] Unfortunately the error of the criticism was distinctly palpable. A portion of this article was reprinted by his father in the memorial volume which contained some of his son's writings. In that, however, the part of it which dealt specifically with the various pieces of the new poet was omitted—omitted, too, very wisely. There was little restraint upon the praise heaped upon him, and the censure—which every critic feels compelled to bestow—was limited to a few slight cavils on the use of particular words. He spoke

[1] 'Autobiography and Letters of Dean Merivale,' Oxford, 1898, p. 160.

of Tennyson as being of the school of Shelley and Keats. Both these he highly praised. He quoted in full the 'Recollections of the Arabian Nights,' 'Oriana,' and 'Adeline.' The first of these was on the whole his favorite of all the poems. Some idea of the feeling about it he entertained as well as of the extravagance of his criticism may be inferred from his assertion that its sixth verse was as majestic as Milton and its twelfth as sublime as Æschylus. It was remarks like these which aroused the amusement and wrath of Christopher North. Leigh Hunt protested, too, at the time against the peculiar absurdity of representing him as the originator of a school to which belonged Shelley and Keats. He said very justly that there was nothing in common between those authors and himself but personal regard, a common zeal for mankind, and a common love of the old poets. He further exhibited the difference in the point of view by observing that Hallam's observations on Tennyson's writings were more to the purpose than the specimens he gave of them. In Hunt's opinion he had selected some of the least perfect and effective of the poems, apparently for the reason that they had been omitted by others.

Facts such as these show how zealously the poet's friends were working in his behalf. There are indications of this action on their part on every side. Milnes, while in Italy, received in February, 1831, a letter from his college friend, Monteith, one of the Apostles. "Have you seen," wrote the latter,—"by-the-bye you cannot—the review of Tennyson's poems in the *Westminster?* It is really enthusiastic about him, and is

very well written on the whole. If we can get him well reviewed in the *Edinburgh,* it will do." It hardly needs to be said that they did not get him well or ill reviewed in the 'Edinburgh.' That lofty periodical was not flying at any such supposedly small game. Still, it would be unjust to suggest that the favorable notices which Tennyson received were in all cases due directly or indirectly to personal friendship. There was much in the poetry of his volume which appealed to those who were in sympathy with the genius of Shelley and of Keats. Accordingly no external agencies were needed for such men to give expression to their admiration.

Two instances may be given in illustration. A review of the volume of 1830 appeared in the March number of 'The New Monthly Magazine' for 1831. The estimate expressed of Tennyson's volume was highly favorable. That fact was not due to any previous understanding or any outside influence. On the contrary, the critic confessed that when encountering at the outset some corrections in the list of errata, he was prepared for merriment. It needed the reading, however, of but a few of the pieces to dissipate any expectations of that nature. He recognized at once the coming of a true poet. So far as I have observed, this was the only review of the time which pointed out distinctly the direct influence of Keats upon the new aspirant for poetic honors—for in Hallam's article this was stated only in general terms. But in Tennyson this critic found all the characteristics which had given its distinguishing mark to the work of his prede-

cessor. "It is full," he wrote, "of precisely the kind of poetry for which Mr. Keats was assailed, and for which the world is already beginning to admire him. We do not mean that it contains anything equal, either in majesty or melody, to the 'Hyperion,' the 'Ode to the Nightingale,' or the 'Eve of St. Agnes.' But it does contain many indications of a similar genius."[1]

The review in truth gave enthusiastic praise to much of the contents of the volume. While the existence of imperfections was conceded, the prediction was made confidently that here was a light which was destined to shine before men. Indeed unless we are to credit the reviewer with the possession of prophetic foresight, the laudation will seem too extreme. Yet there is no question that it was not only sincere, but was altogether unaffected by personal considerations. Nor was this the only one of the favorable notices which came from the outside. 'The Spectator,' which a short time before had started on its long and creditable career, contained also what was on the whole a highly complimentary review. In it the critic confessed to having experienced an agreeable surprise in finding the work as good as it was. He had evidently been prejudiced against the volume by the knowledge that had come to his ears that its author had written a prize poem. What faults he found with him in his criticism were due to the fact that he expected to meet with him again.[2] Sentiments of the same general nature, though much more briefly expressed, may be

1 'New Monthly Magazine,' Vol. XXXIII, p. 111.
2 No. for May 8, 1830.

also found in an early notice in 'The Atlas.'[1] That periodical, indeed, claimed later to have been the first to recognize Tennyson's genius. It is evident that in these criticisms considerations due to friendship had no weight whatever.

[1] No. for June 27, 1830.

CHAPTER VIII

CHRISTOPHER NORTH'S REVIEW

We have seen that the criticism of Tennyson's first volume had been generally favorable. Not unnaturally in the majority of the reviews of the period it was not spoken of at all. But nowhere was active hostility displayed. If there was dissent in any quarter from the enthusiastic praise which had been lavished upon it by some, it was not manifested publicly; at least it was not in the organs which had the greatest influence with readers. A good deal of the commendation which his work had received was undoubtedly due to the zeal of personal friendship, acting either directly or indirectly. But this had manifestly not been the case in certain instances. Much of the warm welcome which had been extended to Tennyson's first poems had come from independent and absolutely impartial sources. There is no question that in many quarters the volume of 1830 had made a distinctly favorable impression by its own merits.

None the less had personal considerations played a great part in the most important notices which the work had received. There is no question that in these early years Tennyson was subjected to an undiscriminating approval and even gross flattery which, had it been left unchecked, would have had a baleful effect

upon the development of his poetic power. Up to this time he had not produced a single piece of the highest class. He had produced some which later he himself came to look upon with distinct disfavor. There was a great deal of promise in his work; speaking comparatively, there was little of performance. Had Tennyson then died, the world would not only have remained generally ignorant of his achievement, but many of the few that had come to know it would have been disposed to deny him the capability of accomplishing anything that could be deemed worthy of much consideration. But even at this early period his partisans insisted that he had already accomplished great work. All that was peculiar and sometimes highly ornate was celebrated by them as evidence of a new and original vein. All that was vague was held up as marking depth of thought, as exhibiting penetration into the mysterious recesses of the soul into which it was granted to but few to enter. "That these poems will have a very rapid and extensive popularity we do not anticipate," said 'The Westminster Review.' "Their very originality will prevent their being generally appreciated for a time." Originality there certainly was; but it was not that which stood in the way of their reception. There was in truth a good deal in these early poems to make a thoughtful critic hesitate. With the possession of a vein of unmistakable genius and perhaps great poetic power plainly indicated, there was a certain proportion of magniloquence, a pomp of language too exalted for the ideas it clothed. There were passages of occasional mistiness, and

what was worse, there were at times prettinesses of expression, a preciosity indeed which indicated that the Tennyson of that day was approaching dangerously near the verge of namby-pambyism.

Even had there been no defects of this nature, it is clear that the unmeasured laudation poured forth upon Tennyson by his friends would be certain to meet with protest. If Parnassus is to be taken by assault, it must be by the poet in person. It cannot be done by those who are fighting for him. They can aid; but they can never put him in possession. In this instance the eagerness displayed by them to celebrate his achievement did him actual though temporary harm. The unwisdom of their course was pointed out at this early period by Trench, though he was thinking rather of the detriment wrought to the man himself than to his reputation. In writing to a correspondent he praised some of Charles Tennyson's poems. "I think," he added, "his brother may be a much greater poet even than he is, but his friends at Cambridge will materially injure him if he does not beware; no young man under any circumstances should believe he has done anything, but still be forward looking."[1] Unfortunately this was not the sentiment held by his young admirers. Their overstrained enthusiasm in his behalf was not only resented, it led to hostile demonstration. In the end this latter proved a distinct benefit. From the harm which would have been wrought by the indiscriminate adulation he was receiving,

[1] Letter to W. B. Donne of June 23, 1830, in R. C. Trench's 'Letters and Memorials,' Vol. I, p. 74.

which sought to forestall public opinion and impose upon it a poet almost without asking its consent, Tennyson was saved by agencies which at the time he undoubtedly looked upon with disfavor.

There was an ominous growl in what was on the whole a fairly favorable reference to Tennyson which appeared in the 'Noctes Ambrosianæ' in 'Blackwood's Magazine' for February, 1832. It followed one of those periodic lamentations which came out then with the regularity of the seasons about the decay that had overtaken poetry. Christopher North is represented as saying that he saw no new poets appearing above the horizon. When he is asked if there are no "younkers," he replies:

"A few—but equivocal. I have good hopes of Alfred Tennyson. But the Cockneys are doing what they may to spoil him—and if he suffers them to put their bird-lime on his feet, he will stick all the days of his life on hedgerows, or leap fluttering about the bushes. I should be sorry for it—for though his wings are far from being full-fledged, they promise now well in the pinions—and I should not be surprised to see him yet a sky-soarer. His 'Golden Days of good Haroun Alraschid' are extremely beautiful. There is feeling—and fancy—in his Oriana. He has a fine ear for melody and harmony too—and rare and rich glimpses of imagination. He has—*genius.*"

To this statement his interlocutor replies, "Affectations."

"Too many," North answers. "But I admire Alfred—and hope—nay trust—that one day he will

prove himself a poet. If he do not—then am I no prophet."

This is certainly mingling a good deal of praise with a very little censure. It indicates, too, much greater prescience than is ordinarily possessed by the astutest of critics. But Wilson was as keenly alive to Tennyson's defects as he was to his merits. Still, about the former he would probably have said little, had not his wrath been aroused by the gross flattery which had been heaped upon the poet under the guise of criticism. In 'Blackwood's Magazine' for the following May he returned to the author. It was the first attempt at a discriminating examination of the poems which they received; for Leigh Hunt's article, while condemning some of his pieces, had raised Tennyson to a height to which he had not as yet attained. Wilson's review, on the contrary, was a careful effort to point out what was good and what was bad in the work already accomplished. His criticism had of course the defects of its writer's virtues. It was marked by the contempt which all of the Blackwood school of contributors felt or professed to feel for the body of authors whom they designated as Cockneys, and who had previously been accused of doing what they could to spoil Tennyson. Wilson naturally could not refrain from the accustomed fling. "We shall not define poetry," he said at the beginning of his review, "because the Cockneys have done so; and were they to go to church, we should be strongly tempted to break the Sabbath."

This feeling it was which led Wilson to attack the praisers of Tennyson before he turned his attention

to the poet himself. He said nothing directly indeed about Leigh Hunt, whom naturally he would regard as the chief of the Cockney school. His reticence may have been due to the fact that with one glaring exception the views of the London critic generally agreed with his own. It was upon the review in the 'Westminster' and upon Hallam's article in 'The Englishman's Magazine' that the weight of his invective mainly fell. His notices of them were characterized by that reckless rowdyism which was apt to be intermingled with his most serious utterances. He set out with the declaration that the besetting sin of periodical criticism was boundless extravagance of praise. None, however, had been splashing it on like the trowel-men who had been bedaubing Mr. Tennyson. Of him, he said, the world knew yet little or nothing; but though his friends called him a phœnix, he hoped that the poet would not be dissatisfied if he designated him simply as a swan. "One of the saddest misfortunes," he remarked, "that can befall a young poet, is to be the Pet of a Coterie; and the very saddest of all, if in Cockneydom. Such has been the unlucky lot of Alfred Tennyson. He has been elevated to the throne of Little Britain, and sonnets were showered over his coronation from the most remote regions of his empire, even from Hampstead Hill."

Before setting out to remove a good deal of the plaster with which Tennyson had been bedaubed, Wilson felt it incumbent to express his contempt for the plasterers. Of these Hallam was the first to fall under his lash. He professed to believe that it was his article

which killed the magazine in which it appeared. "The Englishman's Magazine," he wrote, "ought not to have died; for it threatened to be a very pleasant periodical. An Essay 'On the Genius of Alfred Tennyson' sent it to the grave. The superhuman—nay, supernatural—pomposity of that one paper, incapacitated the whole work for living one day longer in this unceremonious world. The solemnity with which the critic approached the object of his adoration, and the sanctity with which he laid his offerings on the shrine, were too much for our irreligious age. The Essay 'On the Genius of Alfred Tennyson,' awoke a general guffaw, and it expired in convulsions. Yet the Essay was exceedingly well-written—as well as if it had been 'On the Genius of Sir Isaac Newton.' Therein lay the mistake. Sir Isaac discovered the law of gravitation; Alfred had but written some pretty verses, and mankind were not prepared to set him among the stars. But that he has genius is proved by his being at this moment alive; for had he not, he must have breathed his last under that critique. The spirit of life must indeed be strong within him; for he has outlived a narcotic dose administered to him by a crazy charlatan in the Westminster, and after that he may sleep in safety with a pan of charcoal."

Wilson now set out, as he said, to do justice to this ingenious lad, as he termed Tennyson. His object was to save him from his worst enemies, his friends. Praise he should have, but not in lavish profusion. "Were we not afraid," he wrote, "that our style might be thought to wax too figurative, we should say that

Alfred is a promising plant; and that the day may come when, beneath sun and shower, his genius may grow up and expand into a stately tree, embowering a solemn shade within its wide circumference, while the daylight lies gorgeously on its crest, seen from afar in glory—itself a grove." But such a day would never come, Wilson assured him, if he did not hearken to the advice of his critic. "We desire to see him prosper," he remarked; "and we predict fame as the fruit of obedience. If he disobey, he assuredly goes to oblivion." In the spirit of the loving chastener he prefaced his praise by a number of blows from the accompanying crutch with which he was wont to deal out punishment to those in need of correction.

Wilson first proceeded to point out poems in this volume which struck him as failures. The list was a fairly long one; and it must be admitted that his strictures were not distinguished by any restraint in the use of vituperative epithets. The 'National Song' he characterized as miserable, as also the 'English War Song.' Both were fully entitled to the adjective. 'We are Free' was drivel, 'Lost Hope' was more dismal drivel. Even more dismal drivel still was 'Love, Pride, and Forgetfulness.' All these he accused of a painful and impotent straining after originality, and aversion from the straightforward and strong simplicity of nature and truth. The sonnet beginning 'Shall the Hag Evil die with child of Good' gave, he said, the impression of being idiotic. The piece entitled 'The Poet's Mind' was mostly silly, some of it prettyish, scarcely one line of it all true poetry. 'The How

and the Why' was from beginning to end a clumsy and unwieldy failure. The pervading characteristic of 'The Merman' was a distinguished silliness. The same impression appears to have been created on the critic's mind by 'The Mermaid' and 'The Sea-Fairies.' The two pieces 'Nothing will Die' and 'All Things will Die,' so highly praised in the 'Westminster,' were only two feeble and fantastic strains. The poems on the various members of the animal creation further excited Wilson's wrath. 'The Dying Swan' he professed himself unable to understand; but as he had heard Hartley Coleridge praise the piece, he consented to believe that the lines must be fine. As for 'The Grasshopper,' Alfred was said to chirp and chirrup, though with less meaning and more monotony, than a cricket. The two songs to 'The Owl' next fell under condemnation, and Wilson wound up his attack by assailing 'The Kraken' which he regarded as incomprehensible.

It cannot justly be said that a tone of geniality pervades comment of this sort. Some of the extracts given by Wilson—especially those which the writer in the 'Westminster' had adduced as to the poet having the secret of the transmigration of souls—had been selected for censure not so much to express contempt for them as for their critic. This reviewer Wilson styled at various times and in various places in his article on the poems as a crazy charlatan, a quack, a speculative sumph—a Scotch word for 'dunce'—but most frequently as the Young Tailor. One of the sentences about him is worth quoting as a specimen of the

chastened style of critical disapproval then in use, especially among the contributors to 'Blackwood's Magazine.' Wilson cited an extract from the article of the reviewer he was attacking and then proceeded to comment upon it after this fashion. "We could quote," he said, "another couple of critics"—he must have meant Leigh Hunt and Hallam—"but as the force of nature could no farther go, and as to make one fool she joined the other two, we keep to the Westminster. It is a perfect specimen of the super-hyperbolical ultra-extravagance of outrageous Cockney eulogistic foolishness, with which not even a quantity of common sense less than nothing has been suffered, for an indivisible moment of time, to mingle; the purest mere matter of moonshine ever mouthed by an idiot-lunatic, slavering in the palsied dotage of the extremest superannuation ever inflicted on a being, long ago, perhaps, in some slight respects and in low degrees human, but now sensibly and audibly reduced below the level of the Pongos."

This is a specimen of the art of criticism as practised in the first half of the nineteenth century by one of its very foremost professors. But the vehemence of the language, low as well as loud-mouthed as it frequently is, must not prevent us from recognizing the good sense that underlay many of the views expressed. It would be besides a gross mistake to fancy that the passages cited and opinions given furnish a true conception of this noted article. There is this to be said in the first place that in a number of instances the whole or at least a large part of the piece condemned

was printed. The reader consequently, if he had any critical sense—which, to be sure, he usually has not—was supplied with the means of forming his own opinion. In the instance of 'The Poet's Mind,' Wilson said that as it had been admired by several, he quoted it entire, so that if he were in error, the author would triumph over the critic, and Christopher North stand rebuked before the superior genius of Alfred Tennyton. But, furthermore, while he gave up half of his article to heaping abuse upon Tennyson's adulators and upon a number of the poet's own productions, the second half was wholly devoted to his praise. "Having shown," said he, "by gentle chastisement that we love Alfred Tennyson, let us now show by judicious eulogy that we admire him; and, by well-chosen specimens of his fine faculties, that he is worthy of our admiration."

He carried out this intention fully. Wilson quoted in most laudatory terms the part or more usually the whole of several poems—the 'Ode to Memory,' 'The Deserted House,' 'A Dirge,' 'Isabel,' 'Mariana,' 'Adeline,' 'The Sleeping Beauty,' 'Oriana,' and 'Recollections of the Arabian Nights.' It is a singular illustration of the different effect wrought upon two persons, specially susceptible to poetic influences, that this last-named poem, which Leigh Hunt had disposed of so cavalierly, was reckoned by Wilson the highest of all Tennyson's achievements. He printed it in full. He further declared himself in love with all the poet's maidens in addition to those already mentioned—with Claribel and Lilian, with Hero and Almeida. Indeed,

as he approached the conclusion he half apologized for the previous language of depreciation. He declared, in correcting the critique for the press, he had come to see that its whole merit, which was great, consisted in the extracts. "Perhaps," he said, "in the first part of our article, we may have exaggerated Mr. Tennyson's not unfrequent silliness, for we are apt to be carried away by the whim of the moment, and in our humorous moods, many things wear a queer look to our aged eyes, which fill young pupils with tears; but we feel assured that in the second part we have not exaggerated his strength—that we have done no more than justice to his fine faculties—and that the millions who delight in Maga will, with one voice, confirm our judgment—that Alfred Tennyson is a poet." With some further words of advice and warning ended an article which was indirectly destined to have a marked influence over Tennyson's literary fortunes during the years immediately following.

Before taking up, as will be done in subsequent chapters, the consideration of the part which this review was incidentally to play in the history of Tennyson's reputation, the question naturally arises: Can it be deemed unfair?—unfair, of course, in what was said, not in the way in which it was said. We know that in the mind of the poet, with his peculiar susceptibility to critical censure, it awakened deep irritation. So it did in the little circle which surrounded him. Hallam was naturally indignant; for the blow from the crutch which Christopher North professed to wield, fell as heavily upon him as upon the man he had praised—

in fact, more so. But he, as well as the other critics singled out for disparagement, was wise enough to keep silence. Not so, in this instance, was Tennyson. His action was contrary to his usual custom. There were two occasions in his life in which he allowed his resentment to overcome his natural disposition. In the one case he was fully justified in the reply he made to an unprovoked attack; and his retort not merely silenced his assailant, but prevented any further public display of the antagonism which at heart he continued to feel. Yet even of this reply, fully warranted as it was, Tennyson almost immediately repented. He regretted its publication. But in the present instance there was no real ground for the retort which he made not hastily, but after fullest deliberation. Happy would it have been for his peace of mind, happier still for his immediate success, if he had left entirely to others protest against the action taken by the critic.

For such protest there was. It came too from sources outside of the circle of Tennyson's enthusiastic Cambridge friends. The boisterous character of Wilson's article with its alternate contumelious and commendatory utterances naturally attracted attention everywhere. 'The Spectator,' for instance, in a review of the May magazines, spoke of this particular article as the only one in the 'Blackwood' of that month worth reading. It led the critic to designate it as an extravaganza on account of the alternate blame and praise it gave. "When Wilson sits down to write," said 'The Spectator,' "the world appears to him a mere game at nine-pins or perhaps

he is the incarnation of the immortal Punch—he sets all law at defiance, slaps, bangs, and stabs both friends and foes, and all in the merest gayety of heart. In the article we are speaking of, which is on the poems of Alfred Tennyson (a young poet of genuine talent), Mr. Wilson first sets to and abuses, with a charming play of the imagination and an unsparing application of slang, Mr. Tennyson and all his critics; he seems animated with the bitterest contempt for the whole party, and withheld no opprobrium; the poet's imbecility is proved by extracts of every kind; and the critics fall of course with the work they have praised. When the unhappy bard is sufficiently bespattered—after he has been laid prostrate, has been pommeled and bruised, with all the means of annoyance that science and bottom can apply to his discomfiture,—the writer seems, not to repent of his work, but seized with a sudden passion of setting up the idol he had pulled down. The miserable spectacle of a poet is raised on high; although the dirt is not cleared away, it is gilded over with praise as hearty as the abuse; and the Ebonite retires with the satisfaction of having both unmade and made a poet. This is the last trick of our Periodical Punch; he is a fellow of infinite wit and talent, but as to their employment he has never yet been troubled with any conscientious scruples.'"[1]

In no brief time Tennyson came to have ample reason for regretting the exhibition of the anger, which, as we shall see, he was led to express. But was there much real ground for dissatisfaction? That the

[1] 'Spectator,' May 5, 1832, p. 424.

article was written, at least a good deal of it, in the rough rollicking style which characterized the reviews found in the 'Blackwood' of that early period, it is needless to remark. That magazine did not always treat with respect the writers it really reverenced. No one was safe from its attacks. The foibles and weaknesses of Wordsworth were at times mercilessly pointed out in the periodical which had done most of all to exalt him and to convert unpopularity or indifference into partisanship. Naturally if Wordsworth could not escape, there was little likelihood of a newcomer being treated with excessive courtesy. In this instance he was certainly not. Besides the direct denunciation of particular pieces in the article, the tone of patronage running through it was unquestionably offensive. To a man who had already achieved great reputation it would have been in the grossest possible bad taste, though it is unnecessary to add that this fact would not have prevented Wilson from exhibiting it, if the whim had chanced to seize him. But we have to bear in mind that Tennyson at that time was scarcely known outside of a very limited circle. Accordingly can the review as a whole be deemed unfavorable? Against the unsparing condemnation of about half of the poems mentioned in it and the tone of condescension which pervades all of it, must be set the unstinted praise of particular pieces and above everything else the ungrudging recognition that at last had come a man who, if his powers were developed along the right lines, would become a poet whom the world would honor.

Tennyson came to be almost universally recognized by his contemporaries as the supreme poet of the Victorian era—by nearly all of them, it may fairly be added, whose opinions are entitled to much consideration. Of course there was no time in his career in which he was not to some extent the mark of hostile criticism—coming too, though in a very few instances, from men of recognized ability. That is an experience which no man of genius has ever escaped or ever will escape. But in general it may be confidently said that the later attitude towards him of the cultivated public was never seriously affected or his own reputation shaken by the attacks of his depreciators. This body of censurers, too, was largely made up of broken-winded poets and broken-down critics. Nor has this estimate been really disturbed since his death, as the steady sale of his works proves conclusively. Yet it may also be said that to many of the warmest of his later admirers, Wilson's review will seem—as regards its matter, not its manner—to have erred on the side of partiality. It is doubtless an unneeded proof of the finer and keener critical sense of Christopher North as compared with most modern students of literature, that with all the knowledge we possess of what Tennyson was and actually accomplished, few there are who would now be disposed to accredit him with genius of a very high order on the strength of the poems contained in the volume of 1830.

That the work in question displayed poetic ability was certain. But there are many young writers who display poetic ability who never reach the height of

poetic power. Nor will many modern readers share in the intense admiration which Wilson bestowed upon the Lilians, Claribels, Adelines, Isabels, and other somewhat vague female characters which flit through so many pages of Tennyson's early poetry. They certainly disappeared in process of time from the view of the general public. It is fairly safe to assert, with little danger of the statement being successfully challenged, that were it not for his succeeding work, not one educated man in ten thousand would know that these fanciful beings had ever existed at all. They were in a way attractive; but it was the novelty of these characterizations that made them attractive, not so much the characterizations themselves. Nor are the warmest admirers of the poet now likely to deny that in the first volume were some dreadful things. That Tennyson came to think so himself before the review in 'Blackwood's Magazine' appeared, we know from incontestable sources. These admissions ought to be made here because the later attitude of Wilson to the poet reveals him, as will be seen, as clearly in the wrong as in this case he was in the right.

Before the publication of his next volume of verse Tennyson was drawn into contributing to a number of periodical publications then in much vogue. These collectively were called the Annuals. During the period of the poet's youth they occupied a conspicuous though not an important place in the literature of the transition period. Their full history has never been written; by some, perhaps by many, it will not be thought worth writing. Yet for the part they played

in the literary activities of the second quarter of the nineteenth century, for the number of great names they enrolled in their list of contributors, but here, in particular, for the connection, slight as it was, which Tennyson had with them, a brief history of their origin and character can hardly be deemed out of place. Consequently before proceeding to the account of his second poetical venture, the story of the Annuals and of his contributions to them will form the subject of the following chapter. In order to make this part of the subject complete in itself, so far as he is concerned, it will include the consideration of all the pieces of his which appeared in publications of this nature before the appearance of the 'Poems' of 1842.

CHAPTER IX

THE ANNUALS

Part One

The Origin and History of the Annuals

In the history of literature, at least of modern literature, there appears at pretty regular intervals a class of productions which strike the popular fancy and meet for a while with phenomenal success. Usually they are of the nature of periodical publications. As extent of circulation is the main object of their promoters, with the pecuniary results that attend it, the aim of these persons is to gain for their enterprise the benefit of great or at least well-known names. They frequently secure the men; they rarely secure the expected corresponding matter. One gets, in truth, from examining most of this class of productions the impression that there seems to be among the best authors, who contribute to them, a real, though unavowed, determination to do their worst; to see just how badly they can write; as if periodical publications of this kind had been set up mainly for the purpose of carrying off the literary refuse which had been stored away in the garrets of the great; or perhaps for offering a safe means for the expulsion

of certain noxious intellectual humors which had been fermenting in their brains.

Students of literary history can call to mind the existence at various periods of several sorts of publications which fulfilled the functions just described. The work they are wont to accomplish was performed in the second quarter of the nineteenth century by what were then called the Annuals. Their origin belongs to the early part of the third decade. In the London papers of November and December, 1822, appears an advertisement inserted by Rudolph Ackermann, a fine-art publisher, who was well and widely known for the illustrated books and periodicals he was in the habit of bringing out. It ran to this effect: "Forget Me Not; or Annual Pocket Chronicle, to serve as a token of Friendship and Affection at the approaching season; with thirteen highly-finished engravings by Agar; containing interesting Tales, Poetry, a Chronicle of Remarkable Events, a Genealogy of the Reigning Sovereigns and their Families, a list of the Ambassadors at the different courts, and a variety of other useful articles of reference." Then followed the description and price of the volume.

This book, bearing the date of 1823, was the pioneer of the publications specifically styled the Annuals. These for the next twenty years occupied a conspicuous if not an important position in the literature of the times. They did not die out entirely till more than thirty years had gone by. As will be inferred from the advertisement, the volume was originally planned for people of diverse tastes. It had engrav-

ings for those who thought themselves fond of the fine arts. It had poetry and fiction for those who considered themselves lovers of literature. Besides all this it appealed to that thirst for useful information which is supposed to spring perennial in the human heart. It furnished a collection of facts, especially about the courts of Europe, their rulers and the diplomatic bodies connected with them, which, it was assumed, would make it of especial value for consultation and reference. For those, too, who were fond of statistics the population of the principal cities of the globe was given.

The venture must have been successful. Not only did a second volume come from the same publishing house at the end of the following year, but another work of a similar character was brought out by a London bookseller, named Lupton Relfe. Its title was 'Friendship's Offering, or the Annual Remembrancer.' This was described in the advertisement which appeared towards the end of 1823 as a Christmas Present and a New Year's Gift for the year 1824. "This little volume," it added, "in addition to the usual pocket-book information, contains a series of highly finished continental views by artists of the first eminence, two very splendid emblazoned title-pages, a presentation plate and other embellishments. It contains also a new Tale of Temper, several original poems by Mrs. Opie, songs, quadrilles. Intended to imitate the long and highly celebrated continental pocket-books."

These two works—'The Forget Me Not' for 1823

and for 1824, and 'Friendship's Offering' for 1824—are the Annuals in their first stage. As has been seen, they were avowedly imitated from the Almanachs and Taschenbuchs which had long been in use in Germany. They contained a certain portion of purely literary matter with a sprinkling of historical and statistical. Their aim consequently was to appeal on the one side to the lovers of fashion and amusement, on the other to those in pursuit of useful knowledge. The two aims are not absolutely incompatible, but experience has demonstrated that from a business point of view they ordinarily succeed best when prosecuted separately. This fact had not escaped the attention of a man of letters who had the peculiar gifts which fitted him to gain distinction in the management of undertakings of this kind. The person alluded to was Alaric Alexander Watts, who in contemporary literature had the Hunnish Attila frequently added to his Gothic personal name, in place of the Alexander, with which he had been baptized. In 1824 he was successful in persuading the publishing house of Hurst and Robinson to engage in the production of a literary and artistic miscellany on certain lines which he had marked out. These were distinctly different from what had prevailed before. Accordingly in November, 1824, came out under his editorship 'The Literary Souvenir, or Cabinet of Poetry and Romance' for 1825. This new venture discarded everything entirely which partook of a temporary nature. It contained nothing in the shape of useful information. It pandered to no diseased appetite for statistics. It even

abolished the almanac. It based its claim to favor largely upon the contributions of as many of the most famous writers of the day as could be obtained, but also upon embellishments by well-known engravers. On this latter feature special stress was laid.

The undertaking was looked upon by those concerned in it as an experiment. But in that condition it did not remain long. Even before its publication its success had become assured in the minds of both projector and publisher. At first it was thought that as many as 2,000 copies could be printed with safety. Then the number fixed upon rose successively to 3,000, to 4,000, to 5,000 copies, and finally settled upon 6,000. The book had not been out two weeks before the publisher sent to the projector an exulting pæan on its triumph, and the failure of envious rivals to retard its majestic march to supremacy. He made no secret of the serene satisfaction he felt in contemplation of the noble motives which animated his own course—emotions which are apt to sway the minds of men when things are moving in a way to suit themselves. "We are going on gloriously," wrote Robinson to Watts, "with the 'Literary Souvenir'; and altogether living above the malice of our enemies; and enjoy in our own breasts nobler feelings, pursuing the direct course of business, disregarding all tricks, and selling more books than they! You may rely upon it, next year we will sell ten thousand copies."

The success of the new publication was so pronounced that there was nothing for the rival firms to do but to follow in the path which 'The Literary

Souvenir' had marked out. It further led to the setting on foot of numerous undertakings of a similar character. There sprang up in consequence a mushroom growth of these publications which threatened to destroy the prosperity of all by reducing the profits of each to an inadequate amount. Their common aim was to secure the finest engravings for the embellishment of the volume in question and to enroll the most celebrated names among their contributors. For a while, their increasing number did not interfere with their success. Towards the end of the third decade of the century the struggle between the various sorts of these publications already established and the new ones constantly projected may fairly be described as fierce. Annuals were devised to meet the tastes, the feelings, and the prejudices of particular classes. If one succeeded, an imitation of it was sure to follow. For instance, 'The Amulet,' founded by Samuel Carter Hall, came out in 1826, with an avowed appeal for support to the religious community. This was plainly indicated by its sub-title of 'Christian and Literary Remembrancer.' As might be expected, a similar publication called 'The Iris' soon made its appearance.

In truth, it was not long before Annuals came into existence which touched upon every subject in which the human mind is, or appears to be, interested. There were geographical Annuals; there were missionary Annuals; there were biblical Annuals; there were botanical Annuals; there were musical Annuals, and inevitably a number of comic Annuals, of which Hood's was the most successful, and retains even to

this day something of the original reputation it then acquired. Appeals were made also to local and national feeling. There were provincial Annuals; there were English Annuals; there were Scottish Annuals; there were British Annuals. It was about the beginning of the fourth decade that publications of this nature showed the most distinct tendency to specialize. This was particularly true of those of them in which the pictorial was designedly made the main attraction. Of this class, there sprang up among others oriental Annuals, landscape Annuals, continental Annuals. These finally reached their culmination in such publications as 'The Book of Beauty' and 'Finden's Drawing Room Scrapbook.' There were other classes besides. As early as 1829, juvenile Annuals appeared on the scene and for several years maintained themselves successfully. Even infant Annuals were brought out. Furthermore, an Annual—'Le Keepsake Français'—appeared in the French tongue. It was published both at Paris and London, but it is from the latter place that the inspiration for its existence manifestly came. On the list of its contributors appear the names of some of the most eminent Frenchmen of letters. For instance, in its second volume—that for 1831—are to be found articles by Béranger, Chateaubriand, Dumas, Mérimée, Victor Hugo, Lamartine, Sainte-Beuve.

The most serious rival of the original Annuals was 'The Keepsake,' undertaken by Charles Heath, a noted engraver of the time. It first appeared towards the end of 1826. From the outset this publication was

remarkable in several ways, and later it became even more so. It was projected on a much more elaborate and expensive scale than any of the Annuals which had preceded it. Against the dozen or so of engravings furnished by its predecessors, it contained twenty-one. It was sold for a guinea while their price had been but twelve shillings. Much money was spent on the illustrations; some even of the smaller plates cost from a hundred to a hundred and fifty guineas. The contributors to the first volume of this Annual were anonymous, but the engravings had made the work so successful that in the volumes succeeding the initial one of 1827, names were attached. The work became particularly noted for its list of titled contributors, the nobles, the honorables and the right honorables, both men and women. In consequence it speedily assumed a specially aristocratic and exclusive character, the rank of the writer frequently supplying the lack of merit in the writing. This distinguishing trait was remarked as early as the volume for 1832. "The Keepsake," said 'The Literary Gazette' of October 1, 1831, "has the most aristocratic list of contributors—there are very few common names."

It was of course impossible that all of these publications could continue to flourish in the intense competition that was going on. Several of them died with the year of their birth. Three or four years was the utmost life to which several others attained. Nor was it a long time before they had all entered upon the downward road. A change had taken place in the public taste. Accordingly they began to fall into

positive disrepute. "What a few years since," said the preface to the 'Forget Me Not' of 1837, "it was the fashion to commend and extol, it appears now to be the fashion to sneer at and decry." Their downward course was still further noted in the volume for 1842 of the same publication. "Certain it is," said the editor, "that the Annuals, from especial favourites of the public, have come to be regarded almost with indifference." To the observant it was plainly evident that their career was practically closed. Several of them continued to exist much later, and occasionally, a new one was projected. But it had become manifest that the disappearance of all was merely a question of time. 'The Forget Me Not,' the original publication of this class, was discontinued with the volume for 1848: its earliest competitor, 'Friendship's Offering,' had died four years before. They dropped out one by one in the fourth and fifth decades of the century, though they continued to survive till the sixth decade. The final volume of 'The Keepsake,' for instance, was that for 1857.

During the heyday of their popularity, however, no fear was entertained of their ultimate failure. The main purpose they served was that of supplying Christmas and New Year's gifts. If Emerson's view be correct that things useful are not best fitted for such purposes, the Annuals approached as near his ideal as anything that could have been devised. As the custom of making presents was never likely to die out, it did not occur to the projectors of these volumes that the desire for them would ever disappear. This

object, while the scheme was novel, they admirably fulfilled. In fact, they practically supplanted all other gifts of books and to some extent gifts of any sort. Southey, who was always fertile in devising reasons why his poetry did not sell save the obvious one that people did not care to read it, naturally recognized in these volumes a new obstacle to the circulation of his own works. He gave it as an explanation to his friend Grosvenor Bedford. "The Annuals," he wrote to him in December, 1828, "are now the only books bought for presents to young ladies, in which way poems formerly had their chief vent." The same sentiments he repeated the following March in a letter to Ticknor. "With us," he wrote, "no poetry now obtains circulation except what is in the Annuals; these are the only books which are purchased for presents, and the chief sale which poetry used to have was of this kind."

There is no question indeed that for a while the number disposed of for this purpose was very large. They not only drove almost all other gift books out of the market for the holidays, but they also came to be used as birthday presents. Hence their sale continued to some extent the whole year round. Accordingly, it was natural, as already intimated, that during this time of their popularity their promoters should indulge the highest hopes of their continued success and be ready to pay enormous sums in expectation of it. "The world (bookselling world)," wrote Scott to Lockhart in February, 1828, "seem mad about 'Forget-me-nots' and Christmas boxes. Here

has been Heath the artist offering me £800 per annum to take charge of such a concern, which I declined, of course.'"[1] In this same month Southey wrote that Heath had been to see him to ask for a contribution to the 'Keepsake.'[2] He had told him, Southey says, that fifteen thousand copies had been sold the year before and that for the following year four thousand yards of red watered silk had been bespoken for binding. It is well to remark here that no sooner was the volume for one year out than the work of preparing for that of the following year began.

No one who examines carefully these publications and studies their history can fail to note certain points as being especially characteristic of all. Between the rival promoters there existed keen emulation as to the number of authors of repute they could secure as contributors. Naturally their attention was directed at first to the highest names. But just as naturally these were few. Furthermore, they were difficult to get, and as time went on they came to be expensive when got. Like most publishers they preferred articles they did not have to pay for. To some extent they succeeded, especially at the outset. They searched accordingly the whole literary world for contributors. Scarcely any writer, who had even the smallest body of adherents or imitators, was overlooked. No aspirant who gave the slightest promise of future fame was frowned upon. Men prominent in the political and social world were cordially welcomed. The

1 A. Lang's 'Lockhart,' Vol. II, p. 22.
2 'Life and Correspondence of Robert Southey,' 1850, Vol. V, p. 322.

conductors of these publications were in fact looking for both old and new names with all the earnestness which characterizes, or at least is said by themselves to characterize, magazine editors of the present day. The consequence was that any one who had the slightest pretension to be regarded as occupying the pettiest of positions in the world of letters was sure to be asked to become a contributor.

Nobody, in fact, could escape, however much he tried. Youth was pressed into service and age was not exempt. Even Hannah More, who was past fourscore and had lived long enough to survive her reputation, was resurrected. Writings were imported from America, where as a matter of course the fashion had been imitated. Here the engravings were distinctly inferior; and hard as it may seem to have attained that result, the literary matter was even more vapid. Many American authors appear, however, in the English publications. Irving, it was natural, would be secured. The names of Bryant, Whittier, N. P. Willis, and Willis Gaylord Clark are found in volumes of 'The Literary Souvenir.' A prose piece of Hawthorne's, entitled 'Uttoxeter,' appeared in 'The Keepsake' for 1857. 'The Forget Me Not' for 1839 informs us in the preface that it would be seen "that the fair American contributors whom we last year introduced to our readers have again favoured us with productions of their accomplished minds." These fair American contributors were Mrs. Sigourney and Miss Hannah Flagg Gould. These names are mentioned here not even for the languid interest they

now excite in us, but for the fact of their appearing at all. Their inclusion is merely indicative of the efforts put forth to secure contributors from every quarter.

In truth, the wide-embracing maelstrom swept into its vortex the greatest and the poorest authors. The compositions of statesmen, divines, and critics, the unpublished writings of the dead, the hasty effusions of the living never designed to be printed—all these were eagerly searched for and seized upon. Hardly a writer escaped from contributing, no matter what his opinion of the works themselves. For a while Wordsworth held out. He wrote to a personal friend, who was an editor of one of the Annuals, that he had laid down for himself a general rule not to contribute to these publications. But later the price offered seems to have been too much for his literary austerity; at least no other reason for his change of view is apparent. Generally, however, contributions were secured, wherever possible, without payment. At least no payment was made where at times it was manifestly expected. Charles Lamb was one of the sufferers of this sort. No one had a greater contempt than he for these "combinations of show and emptiness,"[1] as he designated this class of publications. His feelings about them had been naturally aggravated by their failure to pay for his contributions. "Do not let me be pester'd with Annuals," he wrote to Bernard Barton in August, 1830. "They are all rogues who edit them, and something else who write

[1] Letter to Bernard Barton, October 11, 1828.

in them." He spoke from experience; for he had been inveigled into enrolling himself in the class of fools in spite of his assertion that the sight of one of these year-books made him sick. "I have stood off a long time from these Annuals, which are ostentatious trumpery," he had written to Barton in 1827; but he had finally been obliged to succumb at the urgent request of a friend. A little later he bore witness to their success in gaining the highest names. "Wordsworth, I see," he wrote in 1828, "has a good many pieces announced in one of 'em. . . . W. Scott has distributed himself like a bribe haunch among 'em. Of all the poets, Cary has had the good sense to keep quite clear of 'em, with clergy-gentlemanly right notions. . . . Coleridge . . . too is deep among the prophets, the year-servers,—the mob of gentlemen Annuals. But they'll cheat him, I know."[1]

But after all, the body of writers, be it great or small, is limited. This fact brings us to the consideration of another point. It soon came to be noticed that the same names appeared year after year as contributors to the same Annuals. Landor, Disraeli, and Bulwer, for instance, could be regularly found among the authors of the articles contained in Heath's 'Book of Beauty.' But even more noticeable is the extent to which the same names appear during the same year as contributors to different Annuals. There was naturally a desire on the part of some of the publishers to secure for themselves certain authors and a refusal on the part of these to write for others. In their view

[1] Letter to Barton, October 11, 1828.

it was a case where silence was golden. On account of the keenness of the competition, however, this was by no means easy to carry into execution. Furthermore, it was pecuniarily burdensome. Accordingly when it did happen, it was due more to the indolence of the writer than to the enterprise or willing expenditure of the publisher. The consequence was that a somewhat monotonous list of names turns up with almost unfailing regularity in these publications. Campbell, Montgomery, William Lisle Bowles, Milman, Allan Cunningham, Southey, Hogg, Barry Cornwall, Horace Smith, Letitia Elizabeth Landon, Mrs. Hemans, Miss Mitford, came upon the scene everywhere. These are but a few taken at random from the number of those who might be mentioned.

Less frequently met with are other names in different Annuals, but they are far from infrequent in some one or two. This is true in particular of writers like Wordsworth, Coleridge, Scott, Moore, Rogers, Mackintosh, Lockhart, Bulwer, Disraeli, Landor, Carlyle, and Miss Barrett, to mention a few. But the general truth is that the greater the number of contributors he raked together, the prouder was the projector and the more confident was his appeal to the public. Ackermann prefixed to 'The Forget Me Not' for 1831 a poem entitled 'An Incantation.' It was designed to celebrate the glories of what had been accomplished in the realms of art and literature in the Annual for that year. It was in this way he signalized his poetical contributors and justified the demand he made upon the public for its support:

Croly shall our page inspire
With his grandeur, strength, and fire;
And Montgomery's holy strain
Win back earth to heaven again.
Here with Campbell's taste is blent
Delta's heart-felt sentiment;
Here is Landon's sweetness stealing;
Here is Hemans' depth and feeling;
Here is Cornwall's manly mind,
. . . not to tell of hosts behind.

The publisher unquestionably felt that it would require peculiar hardness of heart on the part of the purchaser to resist so stirring an appeal to his higher nature.

It is clear indeed that one of the causes which led to the disrepute into which the Annuals fell was the too frequent recurrence of the same names. The usual contributors soon became too usual to suit the taste of the public. Complaints on this score, if not then loudly expressed, were very plainly implied. But there was a further justification of this fickleness of public opinion. It was an unfortunate but it was none the less a distressingly manifest fact that the majority of contributors seem to have labored to do their poorest. In the case of some of them, to be sure, there was no necessity for any particular exertion in that direction. But poorness of work was often characteristic of articles which were the production of the greatest authors. The array of names was splendid; but to that adjective the contributions were not entitled. This state of things began to be noticed early.

The degeneration in the character of the poetry in particular speedily attracted general attention. It was admitted even by the projectors of these works, especially by those of them who had not always been successful in securing the most eminent authors. "It has been justly observed," said the editor of 'The Forget Me Not' for 1830, "in regard to the contributions of persons of the highest literary repute to works of this class, that the merit of such contributions has generally been in an inverse ratio to the fame of the writers." The poorness of the contributions in verse, as contrasted even with those in prose, speedily became one of the most distinct impressions made upon the minds of readers. As early as 1829 one of the reviewers of the Annuals drily remarked that Helicon was running low that year. It must not indeed be inferred that these publications did not contain pieces that were of permanent value from the point of view of literature pure and simple. In fact, some of the best or at least the best-known poems of certain authors made in them their first appearance. In 'The Gem' for 1829 appeared, for instance, Hood's 'Dream of Eugene Aram,' and Lord Houghton's song of 'I wandered by the Brookside' came out in 'The Book of Beauty' for 1839. Still the occurrence of fine poetical compositions in these publications is exceptional. It may be added that in 'Friendship's Offering' appeared more than a score of Ruskin's poems, though this fact is more interesting to bibliographers than to lovers of poetry.

In truth, as time went on, one of the most noticeable

features connected with the Annuals was the poorness of their literary matter. Such a result was inevitable. Alaric Watts, in setting the fashion which the Annuals came to assume, had taken the step he did because he was convinced that a book of entertainment and a book of reference could not be joined in a publication of this sort with much success as a business investment or as an artistic venture. It was now to be demonstrated that literature and pictures could not be united in the same publication without one yielding the precedence to the other. The result was in the air from the beginning. From the very outset the work of the engraver had been of more importance than that of the writer. The picture was not so much designed to illustrate the letter-press as the letter-press was prepared to illustrate the picture. There is one of Thackeray's novels which gives a very vivid view in many ways of the literary decade from 1830 to 1840. Its readers will remember that the Honorable Percy Popjoy's contribution describing the view of a lady entering a church was a little too bad to be endured in spite of its aristocratic origin. Pendennis accordingly supplies its place by writing the well-known poem entitled 'The Church Porch.'

Rarely was it the case, if ever so, in which the place was so well supplied as in this imaginary instance. The articles of the Percy Popjoys are the articles that are pretty uniformly found in the Annuals. The picture might or might not be good; but the text written to illustrate it was fairly certain to be poor. The history of these publications shows in spite of

occasional exceptions a steady tendency towards degeneration in the literary matter they contain. The two things were in a measure incompatible. Scott with his practical sense saw this plainly. When the editorship of 'The Keepsake' was offered to him, he gave to the projector a perfectly clear reason why nothing could be gained by the union of two things which had little in common. "I pointed out to Mr. Heath," he wrote, "that having already the superiority in point of art, I saw no great object could be obtained by being at great expense to obtain as great superiority in literature, because two candles do not give twice as much light as one, though they cost double price." The advice too was sound for another reason. The Muses, as daughters of the same parents, have doubtless a good deal of family affection among themselves; but after all they are women, and naturally and justly tolerate unwillingly a divided allegiance. Each one is inclined to be jealous of the others, and is not apt to bestow her full favor upon him who wavers in his devotion between her and one of her sisters. Literature in particular is a jealous mistress of the mind. The moment her art is subordinated to that of another, whether it be music or painting, she is apt to become ungracious.

In fact, it may be doubted if the commercial spirit which was at the bottom of these ventures was itself favorable to art, even though it purported to make art the supreme object. Popularity must be secured no matter how much truth might be defied. Nothing therefore must be done which would stand in the way

of a large sale. William Bell Scott tells us how one day he called upon Kenny Meadows who painted the water-color heads for Heath's Annuals. He found him contemplating in a meditative way two drawings on his easel representing Mrs. Page and Anne Page. "What do you think of these now as a pair—mother and daughter?" he asked of his visitor. Scott of course did the only safe thing in giving them praise. "Well," rejoined Meadows, "I have shown them to Heath, and he insists on Mrs. Page being as young as her child! I objected, for many reasons," continued the artist, though to men generally one alone would have seemed all-sufficient. "Oh," replied Heath to Meadows's remonstrance, "I don't care about her maternity, or Shakespeare, or anything else. You must not make her more than twenty, or nobody will buy! If you won't, I must get Frank Stone to do her instead. All Frank Stone's beauties are nineteen exactly, and that's the age for me!"[1]

[1] William Bell Scott's 'Autobiographical Notes,' Vol. I, p. 114.

CHAPTER X

THE ANNUALS

Part Two

Tennyson's Contributions to the Annuals

Tennyson, as the man whom the little knot of Cambridge enthusiasts looked upon as the poet of the future, was not likely to be neglected by the editors of the Annuals. Accordingly in the very same year which witnessed the publication of his earliest independent book of verse, three poems of his came out in 'The Gem.' This was an Annual which had originally made its appearance towards the end of 1828. Its first volume was under the editorship of Hood, though he retained that position only a year. Tennyson's contributions appeared in the volume for 1831, and were of course published in the autumn of 1830. They were entitled, respectively, 'No More,' 'Anacreontics,' and 'A Fragment.' It cannot be said that there is anything remarkable or particularly promising in any one of the three. The first leaves on the mind the impression that the author is trying to say something which it is beyond his power to express. The sense of inadequacy is made perhaps unduly apparent because both poem and subject inevitably suggest the

unrhymed song in 'The Princess,' usually entitled, when separated from its context, 'The Days that are no more'; and that is one of the few pieces which have reached the high-water mark of lyrical achievement in our tongue. 'Anacreontics' again is very ordinary. The third and longest contribution is the best of all, but it cannot be justly spoken of as in itself specially distinctive, still less distinguished. It is written however in blank verse, and displays fully the characteristics of that measure as it was to be exemplified in the poet's later work.

Three sonnets of Tennyson also made their appearance in these Annuals. One of them, 'Check every outburst, every ruder sally,' was originally published in August, 1831, in the short-lived 'Englishman's Magazine.' As that periodical died two months afterward, and never had a large circulation, some of the pieces which had been published in it were republished in 'Friendship's Offering' for 1833. Among them was this poem. The year before another sonnet had appeared in one of these publications, entitled 'The Yorkshire Literary Annual.' This particular volume seems to have been designed to appeal to the inhabitants of the North of England. It was dedicated to Lord Morpeth, who contributed an opening poetical address celebrating the merits of Yorkshire. The work, according to the editor's introduction, was intended "to afford amusement for the leisure hour, and to promote the hilarity of the winter's evening, by a diversity of subject; and to dispose it in such a manner as to form a combination at once pleasing to

the eye, and gratifying to the taste." The result hardly answered to the lofty language of the preface, and this particular Annual never appeared again. Tennyson's contribution began with the words:

There are three things which fill my heart with sighs.

It was apparently an outcome of his summer trip to the Pyrenees in 1830. It purports to be inspired by a maiden whom he had seen of late,

In old Bayona nigh the Southern sea.

It may be added that this Annual contained also a sonnet by Edward Tennyson, the brother next in age to the poet. Finally another sonnet beginning

Me my own fate to lasting sorrow doometh

appeared in 'Friendship's Offering' for 1832. None of all these contributions just mentioned were included by him in the editions of his poems which appeared either in 1832 or in 1842. They did not deserve to be.

These just-mentioned contributions to the Annuals made up everything which Tennyson published independently after the volume of 1830, and before the appearance of the volume of 1832. In them he had remained faithful, even if unconsciously, to the unwritten but understood rule which proscribed distinguished merit to anything which appeared in the columns of these publications. Yet the same critical admiration on the part of his Cambridge friends which greeted all his efforts, waited also upon these produc-

tions. Milnes, who was travelling at the time upon the Continent, wrote to his father to send him 'The Gem.' The request evidently surprised the parent, though he forwarded him the desired volume. "If you had only looked at the Gem," the son wrote in reply from Venice in March, 1831, "you would have seen that I only sent for it, because it contained some of Tennyson's finest poetry." It would have been a pretty poor outlook for his permanent reputation, had this estimate been true. The opinion of disinterested or indifferent readers was by no means so favorable. The only notice of his contributions which appears in any prominent critical journal can hardly be deemed enthusiastic. In fact, Tennyson had already begun to get a faint foretaste of the hostile criticism which was to teach him the folly of expecting to have reputation conferred upon him either by the agency of personal friends or of professional reviewers. 'The Gem' was noticed in 'The Literary Gazette' for October 16, 1830. It praised the volume highly and made a number of extracts. But to the three pieces for which this Annual for that year is now chiefly valued—not, to be sure, for their worth, but for the fact of their existence in it—the following contemptuous comment was accorded. "To Mr. Tennyson's poems," remarked the critic, "we can only say, in the words of Shakespeare, 'They are silly, sooth.'" The punctuation of the quotation, whether intentional or not, is the reviewer's own.

But if none of these early contributions to the Annuals had particular merit, no such criticism can be

passed on the two poems which are the only pieces of his which broke the ten years' silence that followed the publication of the volume of 1832. For the sake of completing the subject these are to be considered here. During the four years which followed his second venture, nothing new of Tennyson's writing appeared in any of the Annuals or anywhere else. For those which had previously appeared in them he had received no pay. He doubtless expected none; but he probably had a preference for being treated with common decency. "Provoked by the incivility of editors," he wrote in December, 1836, "I swore an oath that I would never again have to do with their vapid books." The oath, however, had not been kept. In 'The Keepsake' for 1837—which came out early in November, 1836—appeared one of the most exquisite of his minor poems, 'St. Agnes.' This Annual was then under the editorship of Lady Emmeline Stuart Wortley, who after a fashion was herself a poetess. It was apparently through the agency of his college friend, Brookfield, that Tennyson was induced to contribute. It is manifest from her conduct that the editress had as little conception as the average critic of that day of the treasure she had secured.

A second time he broke his oath. In the spring of 1836 a gift-book, got up according to the usual form of the Annuals, was projected for the benefit of a graduate of Cambridge University, who was at that time the editor of the 'Encyclopædia Metropolitana.' This person was a clergyman of the name of Edward

Smedley. He was a writer of popular historical works which have now been forgotten and of poetical pieces which have never been remembered. Smedley was, in truth, a very facile writer of verse and seems to have been taken seriously by some of his friends as a poet. In this fourth decade of the century, his health was breaking down, partly under the burden of literary exertions which his strength did not permit him to endure. In fact, shortly after the project designed to aid him was set on foot, he died. The scheme, however, was not abandoned. The preparation of the volume was continued with the intention of devoting the proceeds of its sale to the support of his family. Its editor was a lord, the Marquis of Northampton. A great effort was put forth to gather as contributors the most considerable names in literature; and though nothing was paid for the articles, it was fairly successful in this particular. Wordsworth, Southey, Moore, Landor, Henry Taylor, James Montgomery, and scores of others more or less noted in letters, were represented, besides a large number of men prominent in political life. The work appeared at the end of August, 1837, under the title of 'The Tribute, a Collection of Miscellaneous Unpublished Poems by various Authors, edited by Lord Northampton.' Strictly speaking, the work cannot be included among the Annuals. It corresponds rather to the volumes under the title of Miscellanies which came out in the reign of Queen Anne and the first Georges; but in spirit as well as in form it was like the publications of the

gift-book character, which had so long been the rage. Here accordingly the account of it belongs.

The articles for this volume were not secured without considerable effort. Among the most active of Lord Northampton's coadjutors was Richard Monckton Milnes. He sought to lay under contribution all his poetical friends, or perhaps it would be more comprehensive to say—it is certainly more exact—all his friends who wrote poetry. Trench, Alford, Spedding, Aubrey De Vere, Julius Hare, even Whewell were called upon by this indefatigable solicitor. In most cases he succeeded. Tennyson of course could not escape. From him, however, he met at first with a gruff refusal. That the Marquis had been assured by Milnes that Tennyson would write for the publication something exceeding the average length of contributions to the Annuals, or that he would write for the volume at all, was treated as an elegant fiction. The poet recited his previous oath and his failure to keep it. "I brake it," he went on to say, "in the sweet face of Heaven when I wrote for Lady What's-her-name Wortley. But then her sister wrote to Brookfield and said she (Lady W.) was beautiful, so I could not help it. But whether the Marquis be beautiful or not, I don't much mind; if he be, let him give God thanks and make no boast. To write for people with prefixes to their names is to milk he-goats; there is neither honour nor profit. Up to this moment I have not even seen *The Keepsake:* not that I care to see it, for the want of civility decided me not to break mine oath again for man nor woman. And how should such

a modest man as I see my small name in collocation with the great ones of Southey, Wordsworth, R. M. M., etc., and not feel myself a barndoor fowl among peacocks?''

Great was the wrath of Milnes at the reception of this letter. He at once wrote an angry reply to his friend—of a nature indeed which he certainly would never have ventured upon in later days when that friend's name and fame filled the land. What he said has not been preserved. The epistle went up Tennyson's chimney, and its contents can be inferred only from the reply it received. From that it is evident that Tennyson's banter had been spoken of by Milnes as ''insolent irony,'' and that several personal reflections were indulged in as to the character and conduct of his correspondent. The letter grieved as well as surprised the poet. His reply was perfectly good-tempered and in every way deprecatory of the wrath he had unwittingly aroused. Unjustifiable in some ways as was much which Milnes manifestly said, like many other unjustifiable things, it was productive of good. Tennyson himself not only agreed to contribute but to procure contributions from his brothers Frederick and Charles. In this he was partially successful. When the volume appeared, it included two poems of the latter.

Neither of the poems of C. T. Tennyson, as his name appears in this volume—and not Charles Tennyson Turner—need now be regarded. Nor are the contributions of scores of men prominent at that time in

literature or society or politics worthy of attention. The real value of this so-called Annual consists almost exclusively in the one poem with the simple heading of 'Stanzas,' which Alfred Tennyson then contributed. It began with the line "Oh that 'twere possible." This, we all know now, was the nucleus about which was subsequently built up the poem of 'Maud.' It is unfortunate that this piece should never have been reprinted in its entirety in the editions of his works authorized by the poet himself. In the form by which it is now known the variations from the original are both numerous and important. These extend not only to details of versification and to the content of the piece but to the central idea underlying it. There are differences in expression as well as in conception. The poem, as it appears in 'Maud,' has thirteen stanzas; one of these—the sixth—is not found in the original. As it appeared in 'The Tribute,' it had sixteen, or really seventeen, for the last, though printed as one, consists strictly of two. In the stanzas which have been preserved in the modern form of the poem there is no small number of variations of language from that found in the form as it first came out. Beside the added stanza, there are verbal changes, all of which are distinct improvements. There are, furthermore, transposition of lines and transposition of verses. Much the most noticeable difference of all is the omission from 'Maud' of the four concluding stanzas of the poem as it appeared in 'The Tribute.'

Their omission was a necessity in consequence of

the variation in the central idea of the two pieces. Throughout there are of course resemblances in the conception. In both there is the same intention to portray poetically insanity in the form of mental hallucination which, as suggested in this piece, was later to be fully developed and clothed with beauty and power in 'Maud.' In both appears in particular the ugly shadow, not of the lost bride but of the ghastly one like unto her, who stands by the lover's bedside at night, and haunts him during the day in crowded streets and the hubbub of market places. There it is, always stealing upon him whithersoever he goes, crossing here and crossing there through the noisy confusion of thronging streets, never leaving him in spite of his repeated imprecations to avoid his sight.

These are the resemblances; but the differences are just as pronounced. In 'Maud' the taint of hereditary insanity in him who tells the tale is plainly indicated at the very outset, and the tendency is developed by circumstances that have already taken place or are speedily to take place. His father has perished in a manner which suggests suicide. By the hand of the hero in the course of the story, falls the brother of the woman he loves and has won. From the very beginning there is a tragic shadow of positive wrong and of doubtful death hanging over the leading characters and those akin to them; and an atmosphere of blood envelops both the wooer and his destined bride as events move on to their inevitable consummation in the grave which receives the body of the one and in the madness towards which the blot upon his brain

is steadily driving the tortured spirit of the other. But in the original version there is no violence imputed or implied. In them mental hallucination has been brought on by sorrow alone for the bride who has been lost.

The recovery too is in both cases different. In 'Maud' the hero is brought back to sanity by the elevating influence of a righteous cause, by the aspirations of a great people waking up to a war in defence of the right. In the original, however, the hope for recovery is based entirely upon the recollections of the one he has lost, picturing her to himself sweet and lovely as he had known her in the days of her earthly life. It is indeed but a phantom of the mind which he recalls; but in this case it is a phantom fair and good, bringing peace and rest to the troubled soul and healing to the wounded heart; guarding his life from ill, displacing the dreary brow and dismal face of the ghastly sister phantom that had dogged his footsteps both in hours of solitude and in the midst of thronging crowds. It is to her, and to her alone, he turns for relief from this dull mechanic ghost, this juggle of the brain, born not of the conscious will, but of the involuntary moving of the blood. Happily for him this dreary apparition cannot pass the limits of the grave; and in the life beyond he will be welcomed by the original of the fair and kindly spirit, who clad in light waits to embrace him in the sky. The poem concludes with the following thirty-four lines, omitted in 'Maud,' which in the original follow the twelfth stanza:

But she tarries in her place,
And I paint the beauteous face
Of the maiden, that I lost,
In my inner eyes again,
Lest my heart be overborne
By the thing I hold in scorn,
By a dull mechanic ghost
And a juggle of the brain.

I can shadow forth my bride
As I knew her fair and kind,
As I woo'd her for my wife;
She is lovely by my side
In the silence of my life—
'Tis a phantom of the mind.

'Tis a phantom fair and good;
I can call it to my side,
So to guard my life from ill,
Though its ghastly sister glide
And be moved around me still
With the moving of the blood,
That is moved not of the will.

Let it pass, the dreary brow,
Let the dismal face go by.
Will it lead me to the grave?
Then I lose it; it will fly:
Can it overlast the nerves?
Can it overlive the eye?
But the other, like a star,
Thro' the channel windeth far,
Till it fade and fail and die,
To its Archetype that waits,
Clad in light by golden gates—
Clad in light the Spirit waits
To embrace me in the sky.

This most exquisite of poetical productions, which was reprinted in 'The Annual Register' for 1837,[1] attracted in a few cases the attention of persons outside of the circle of Tennyson's acquaintance. But so little was it generally appreciated at the time, so utterly was it lost to sight in the jungle of poetical weeds by which it was surrounded, that all memory of it speedily passed away from the minds of men. Save by the comparatively small number who purchased 'The Tribute,' it was hardly known at all. Even to many of these purchasers it was manifestly not known. So completely, in fact, had the very knowledge of its existence disappeared in a few years that Charles Astor Bristed, then pursuing his studies at Cambridge University, secured and transmitted a part of it to 'The Knickerbocker Magazine' in New York. In that it had for its title 'My Early Love.' Both Cambridge student and American editor were ignorant of its fragmentary character and of its previous appearance. Accordingly it was printed in the magazine as a hitherto unpublished poem. Bristed had informed the editor that these lines "he had been permitted to read in the manuscript of the author." If it were exactly transcribed and reproduced from its original, this copy besides being only a part of the poem presents distinct variations from the form of it which came out in 'The Tribute.' In that there were one hundred and ten lines; as it appeared in the magazine there were but sixty-six. Furthermore, there are distinct discrepancies between the two forms.

[1] Vol. LXXIX, p. 402.

In the 'Knickerbocker,' stanzas were run together. The punctuation was largely different. The order of the lines was occasionally changed. Some of those found in 'The Tribute' are omitted, and in one instance there is a line which appears in neither the earlier nor the later form. This condition of ignorance of its original appearance continued with the editor. In a particularly feeble review of 'Maud' which was published in the number of the magazine for November, 1855,[1] he reprinted the stanzas as found in that poem, taking care to preface them with the complacent remark that "the very best thing in the volume is the following which will find thousands of new readers in these pages, although it was originally contributed to the *Knickerbocker* ten years ago."

[1] Vol. XLVI, p. 525.

CHAPTER XI

THE POEMS OF 1832

In the early part of the year 1831, Tennyson was summoned home by the illness of his father. He left the university apparently with little regret for the education he was losing but probably with some regret for the degree. In a letter to one of his friends, dated February 26 of this same year, Merivale spoke of Charles Tennyson as having put off till the next term his graduation, upon which, according to his own statement, all his property depended. "Alfred," Merivale continued, "is trying to make his eyes bad enough to require an ægrotat degree."[1] This was pretty surely spoken in jest; for there is no question that the condition of these organs, more indispensable to him than even to most men, then disturbed Tennyson very much. We are told indeed that for a time he feared that he might lose his sight altogether. Much later in life the motes floating before his eyes continued to fill him with apprehension. In 1847 he wrote to his aunt suffering from the same affliction that these distressed him a great deal. "Mine increase weekly," he said, "in fact, I almost look forward with certainty

[1] 'Autobiography and Letters of Charles Merivale,' Oxford, 1898, p. 151.

to being blind some of these days.'"[1] Still if Merivale's remark were spoken in earnest, it is enough to say here that Tennyson never succeeded in making sufficient impression of his disability upon the authorities to induce them to confer upon him his degree except upon condition of passing the prescribed examinations. Accordingly he left the university without one.

It was but a short time after his return to his home that his father died. On Wednesday, March 16, after about a month's illness, the Reverend George Clayton Tennyson passed away peacefully from what had been to him a troubled and somewhat bitter life. Fortunately for his family, the new incumbent had no desire to live at the rectory. In consequence its occupants were permitted to retain it as their residence. There they continued to dwell until 1837. There Tennyson had his regular home, varied indeed by frequent temporary absences. Though he had abandoned his academic course of study, none the less was he determined to devote himself to a purely literary career. To this resolution he adhered through good report and ill report. The consciousness of his destiny was upon him. There was one life for him to lead and but one. He recognized fully then what Wordsworth was to say later, that "poetry is no pastime, but a serious earnest work, demanding unspeakable study." Though possessed in those early days of a small income, he was, strictly speaking, a poor man. "Alfred," wrote Hallam to Leigh Hunt in November, 1832, "has resisted all attempts to force him into a profession,

[1] 'Memoir,' Vol. I, p. 243.

preferring poetry and an honourable poverty." As it turned out, the pursuit of the one freed him at last from the pressure of the other. This however could not have been foreseen or even anticipated at the outset. It was indeed no easy road he was compelled to travel at first. As things turned out, it was probably far harder than he himself had expected; but from the faith which led him to embrace it, he never once swerved.

While at the university, after the publication of the volume of 1830, he was still engaged in the production of new poems. Trench speaks of meeting him there and of hearing him repeat pieces as yet unpublished. "I saw him," he wrote to a friend, "for a few hours at Cambridge, and heard recited some of his poems, which were at least as remarkable as any in his book."[1] Naturally in the leisure and seclusion of country life this practice of composition would be continued. In the early part of 1832, Arthur Hallam visited him at Somersby. He had himself just attained his majority, and was rejoicing in his new position of acknowledged lover and accepted suitor of Emily Tennyson. It was while there at this time that according to his own account the now officially recognized wooer of the sister succeeded in persuading the brother to bring out a new book of poems.

Even before this time the project had been under consideration. Limited as he was in his means, Tennyson, like all other authors, turned to the pub-

[1] 'Letters and Memorials of Archbishop Trench,' Vol. I, p. 91; letter of May 29, 1831.

lishers. Moxon had wished him to contribute to the magazine—the 'Englishman's'—which he had just taken over from its projectors. Tennyson, in consequence, had, as we have seen, sent him one poem. To Merivale, then in London, Hallam wrote in his friend's behalf from Hastings in August, 1831. He wished him to interview Moxon and ascertain what he would pay the poet for regular contributions. A further inquiry was made if he would give anything for the copyright and if so what, provided Tennyson were to get together material enough to fill a second volume. The ticklish state in which the magazine soon showed itself to be doubtless led the publisher to fight shy of arranging to secure articles for it—at least if he had to pay for them. From the result, however, it is manifest that Moxon either then or later agreed to bring out Tennyson's new work. In a letter to Trench of March 30, 1832, Hallam announced the probability of its appearance that year. Incidentally he gave also his own impression of the man.

"Alfred," wrote Hallam, "I was glad to find better than I had apprehended. I see no ground for thinking that he has anything serious to ail him. His mind is what it always was, or rather brighter, and more vigorous. I regret, with you, that you have never had the opportunity of knowing more of him. His nervous temperament and habits of solitude give an appearance of affectation to his manner, which is no true interpreter of the man, and wears off on further knowledge. Perhaps you could never become very intimate, for certainly your bents of mind are not the same, and

at some points they intersect; yet I think you could hardly fail to see much for love, as well as for admiration. I have persuaded him, I think, to publish without further delay. There is written the amount of a volume rather larger than the former, and certainly, unless the usual illusion of manuscript deceives me, more free from blemishes and more masterly in power.'"[1]

Accordingly during the middle of the year 1832 this new volume was going through the press. In the month of November, Hallam announced its speedy appearance to Leigh Hunt. In the communication, he gave further his own opinion as to its character. "I hope soon," he wrote, "to have the pleasure of presenting you a second collection of poems by my friend Alfred Tennyson, much superior in my judgment to the first, although I thought, as you know, highly of those."[2] The same opinion was expressed in more extravagant terms by other friends of the author. "Alfred Tennyson," wrote Kemble to Trench, "is about to give the world a volume of stupendous poems, the lowest toned of which is strung higher than the highest of his former volumes." The work appeared in the first week of December, 1832. On the title-page it bore, however, the date of 1833. In consequence it is frequently designated as belonging to that year. The collection consisted of thirty poems and covered one hundred and sixty-three pages.

[1] R. C. Trench's 'Letters and Memorials,' Vol. I, p. 111.

[2] J. Nichols's 'Literary Anecdotes of the Nineteenth Century,' Vol. I, p. 27; letter dated November 13, 1832.

No one who compares the contents of this second venture with those of the first can fail to perceive how great had been the growth of Tennyson in power and felicity of execution during the more than two years which had elapsed between the publication of the two volumes. Time, the severest, but also the justest critic of all, has settled this point in a way that cannot be gainsaid. Few of the pieces that appeared in 1830 are now much read or quoted. Many of them are referred to as indicating the rise of a new and original poetic genius; some only of the number are cited as exhibitions of that genius risen and fully developed. The Lilians, the Claribels, the Isabels, with which Christopher North declared himself in love, rarely inspire feelings of that nature now, and with but occasional exceptions no very profound sentiments of admiration. Curiosity is much more the emotion they arouse. The contents of the volume of 1832 were, indeed, distinctly surpassed by many of his later productions. Nevertheless, it contains a number of pieces that have held their own during the countless changes of taste that have gone on during the more than four fifths of a century which have elapsed since their publication. In that volume are to be found, in particular, 'The Lady of Shalott,' 'The Miller's Daughter,' 'The May Queen,' 'The Lotos-Eaters,' 'Œnone,' 'The Palace of Art,' and 'The Dream of Fair Women.' Some of these poems underwent more or less of alteration in the edition of 1842, two or three of them somewhat extensive alteration. But in their original form they were all there. They

were worthy then of the honor in which they have since been steadily held. The most skeptical of men, in contemplating these pieces as the production of a man less than twenty-three years old at the time of their publication, and in many instances much younger at the time of their composition, could not have failed to recognize the fact that a great poetic genius had arisen. To do otherwise required unusual lack of critical discernment or unusual abundance of prejudice.

But as not unfrequently happens, lack of perspicacity was prevalent and abundance of prejudice blinded. A decided change had come over the opinion of the critical world. For the chorus of praise which had welcomed the first work was now substituted a cold dispassionate approval in the most favorable instances; in others a snarl and a bark. The volume of 1832 not only surpassed its predecessor, but it contained a good deal which the world has come to reckon among its treasures. But such was not the sentiment of the time. Scarcely anywhere—it would be nearly true to say nowhere—was there any display of enthusiasm by the professional reviewers. By certain of the most influential among them it was spoken of depreciatingly. By some it was not even noticed at all. Prevalent too in the most favorable notices was that calm and languid approval which is more disheartening to an author than the most ferocious criticism; for this last shows that he has made some impression, even if it be an adverse one. But one point of view was almost universal. There was

a general agreement among the critics that the second venture was inferior to the first.

In spite of a few pieces contained in it, which it would have been well never to have included, the superiority of the second volume to the first is now so manifest that it seems almost incredible that it should have escaped then the notice of even the stupidest of critics. Yet no one can make a study of contemporary opinion, as manifested in the reviews of the period, without becoming aware that its inferiority to its predecessor was generally taken for granted. All men would now be indignant at being accused of entertaining such a view. It was naturally not held by the members of the immediate circle surrounding Tennyson. Nor was it held by those outside who had made themselves really familiar with the poet's writings. Yet this preposterous critical estimate, utterly discreditable to human taste and intelligence, speedily became the prevailing conventional criticism. It was echoed and re-echoed during the ten years which preceded the publication of the poems of 1842. It was repeated not alone by men who lacked sense enough to know any better, but it occasionally came from the lips of some who were presumed to possess judgment. Nor did it entirely cease when Tennyson broke at last his ten years of silence and in a short time placed himself at the head of contemporary poets. It is almost a natural inference from some of the remarks of Christopher North, in his subsequent attacks upon Tennyson, that he held this belief. Still if so, he never stated it in direct

terms. Far different was it with the wordy and windy Gilfillan, who as late as 1847 expressed such an opinion in an article on Tennyson's writings. This critic had not at that time succeeded in making up his mind whether Tennyson was a great poet or not. He informed us however that "his second production was less successful, and deserved to be less successful, than the first. It was stuffed with wilful impertinencies and affectations." It is uncertain whether this utterance of the writer was due to his particular ignorance of the two volumes or to his general incompetence of appreciation. Possibly both were united. At all events it is a proof of the remarkable vitality frequently inherent in silly criticism that any one at that late day could be found foolish enough to revive this then long-exploded nonsense.

A contemporary article there was, the only one of the early notices of the work so far as I can discover, which not merely spoke of the new volume in the highest terms, but in this particular took the modern view. It proclaimed that a distinct advance had been made in this second venture over the first. Yet even in that it was intimated that, superior as was the later collection, it was not so much superior as it ought to have been, taking into consideration the fact that more than two years had elapsed since the earlier collection had been published. With that modification, however, the praise was cordial, and indeed might be called enthusiastic. The article here referred to came out in 'The Monthly Repository,' the organ of the Unitarian body. The editor of the periodical, and

unquestionably the writer of the criticism, was the noted pulpit orator and social reformer, William Johnson Fox, whom Browning was wont to style his literary father. His article appeared in the number for January, 1833. As apparently the only cordial and thoroughgoing praise the work received at the time in any review of the slightest pretension whatever, it deserves a certain amount of consideration for that very reason. It deserves this further because it is the only criticism of that period whose general conclusions have received the sanction of later times.

Fox tells us in this article that it was in the autumn of 1830 that he had first read any of Tennyson's poetry. He was then seeking a temporary rest from the stormy political strife in which he had been engaged. It was a time of tumult and confusion. In France the red flower of revolution had once more burst into triumphant bloom. In England the spirit of reform had come into conflict with the reactionary conservative spirit headed by the great English captain of the age. The battle was still going on. From these feverish and tumultuous scenes the writer of the review informs us that he had escaped for a while into the country. With him he carried a little book, which according to his account no flourish of newspaper trumpets had announced, and in whose train no newspapers had waved their banners. What he read, however, made him feel that a new poet had arisen in the land. This little book was the Tennyson volume of 1830. "It was," he said, "the poetry of truth and nature and philosophy; above all, it was

that of a young man, who, if true to himself and his vocation, might charm the sense and soul of humanity and make the unhewn blocks in this our wilderness of society move into temples and palaces.'' The rest of the article was in accord with this opening. He praised with little restraint the volume which had followed the first. He even found the songs to 'The Owl' in the earlier work ''amusing specimens of humor.'' As amusing examples of this same humor in the latter, he mentioned the lines to Christopher North. Vagaries such as these may be pardoned; for in general the remarks of the critic were just and discriminating. It may be worth while to specify that, while commending and quoting other pieces, Fox declared that ''the best combined play of the author's powers, reflection and imagination, description and melody is in the 'Legend of the Lady of Shalott.' ''

But this single distinctly favorable notice came out in a periodical of limited circulation and necessarily of comparatively limited influence. Its attitude was far from being that of the general critical body. Lukewarm praise there was of certain pieces; positive condemnation of others. It is just to say that to some extent Tennyson was himself responsible for the treatment his work received. The opening pages of his new volume, to which the reader's eyes would ordinarily be first directed, were largely taken up with sonnets. These belong to a species of verse in which the poet never attained distinguished excellence. But, in particular, the book contained towards its end two little pieces which were to have a marked influence

upon the estimation in which its author was for a long time held. One of these pieces never reprinted by him in later editions of his works was headed 'O Darling Room.' This was to become speedily and to remain long the object of constant derisive attack. It rejoiced his enemies, it grieved even his warmest friends.

One illustration of the feelings of the latter will suffice. Fanny Kemble, then in America, did not have an opportunity to read the second collection of poems till the summer of 1833. She was entirely ignorant of what had been said and written about them in England. While expressing the highest admiration of most of the pieces contained in the new volume, she did not conceal her disapproval of one or two, but especially of the particular one just mentioned. She hated, she tells us, the little room with two white sofas. She could easily fancy both the room and the feeling. Still, she recognized clearly that such was not the sort of sentiment out of which good poetry was constituted. It "lends itself temptingly," she observed, "to the making of good burlesque."[1] At the time of her writing, these verses had already been not so much burlesqued as derided. Such we shall discover they continued to be many years after the poet had dropped them from later editions of his works.

But the one piece which had the most damaging effect upon Tennyson's immediate fortunes was that addressed to Christopher North. While the second collection was going through the press, Wilson's

[1] Letter of August 17, 1833, in 'Records of a Girlhood.'

criticism of the first, already described, made its appearance in 'Blackwood's Magazine.' Though the praise was really more lavish than the blame, Tennyson, with that extraordinary sensitiveness to criticism which was a distinguishing weakness of his nature, resented the article deeply. What was supremely foolish, he resented it openly. Nothing could have been more impolitic, especially for a young and little-known author. Even at that early age Tennyson ought to have been aware that however much professional critics may hate each other, they are fairly sure to band together in the defence of any one of their number attacked from the outside. Hallam, whose affection for his friend had led him to speak of the 'Darling Room' as "mighty pleasant," felt and expressed anxiety about the lines to Christopher North, though he himself had been attacked more severely by that reviewer than the poet himself had been. The epigram in his opinion was good. He added, however, "I have scruples whether you should publish it. Perhaps he may like the lines and you the better for them; but"—and here he used a Greek word to express his apprehension.[1] He would have been much more pronounced in his dissuasion had he known that the sensitiveness to criticism of the critic rivalled if it did not even surpass that of the poet.

Tennyson was not influenced by the hesitation of his friend. He paid no heed to the doubt expressed as to the expediency of publishing the epigram. Accord-

1 'Memoir,' Vol. I, p. 88.

ingly when the volume appeared it contained the following lines addressed to Christopher North:

You did late review my lays,
Crusty Christopher;
You did mingle blame and praise,
Rusty Christopher.
When I learnt from whom it came,
I forgave you all the blame,
Musty Christopher;
I could not forgive the praise,
Fusty Christopher.

It is speaking too well of the cheap sarcasm expressed in these verses to call them puerile. Under the circumstances they better deserve the title of babyish. They are hardly worthy of an angry schoolboy. But the lines brought with them their own punishment, without speaking of that which came from outside sources. They constituted the one poem which would be sure to arrest the attention of the most careless reader. From it he would be apt to form his estimate of the man.

Tennyson himself came speedily to be ashamed of this foolish outburst. Apparently also after he had run the gauntlet of a good deal of hostile criticism, he feared that he might be made the subject of a further attack from the then all-powerful reviewer. In February, 1834, was brought out a poem entitled 'Criticism and Taste, a Satire.' It was the work of a certain John Lake, who was apparently by birth a Scotchman, certainly by occupation a tailor, and who further was a writer that perpetrated several poems

and plays hardly heard of at the time and now absolutely forgotten. He had met with a good deal of ill success in putting his literary wares upon the market. He had no special spite against Wilson. Furthermore, according to his own confession, he knew nothing whatever of Tennyson, and had never read any of his poems. Nevertheless he took it upon him to come to his defence against his critic. He versified a number of the characterizations which Wilson had made of particular pieces of Tennyson, especially those which had been stigmatized by a number of derogatory epithets. He then ended with the words of encouragement given by the critic to the poet:

> And yet, "of us if he will take advice,"
> "Us," in whose hands all power and talent lies,
> "The day may come," "with our assistance," he
> "May grow expanding to a stately tree;"
> But if he pride or disobedience "shews,
> Assuredly he to oblivion goes."

Lake forwarded this poem to Tennyson with the implied if not openly expressed intimation that he ought to promote the circulation of the satire which had been written in his defence. This was far from being the wish or intention of the poet. He seems indeed to have feared that the appearance of this little work would furnish a pretext for the infliction of a further castigation of himself in 'Blackwood's Magazine,' in addition to that which he had already received from the most influential critical organs of the day. At any rate, he was led to write Wilson a letter in

which he defended himself from the suspicion of having any sympathy with the spirit or matter of Lake's satire. Further, he apologized for the "silly squib" which he had written upon his reviewer. He remarked also that he could wish that some of the poems which had been broken on the critical wheel in 'Blackwood's Magazine' were deeper than ever plummet sounded, and that he had no desire to see them or hear them again.[1] There is perceptible indeed throughout this whole letter a dread of further attack from Christopher North. No reply seems ever to have been made to it. From later developments it will be found that it failed entirely to placate the angry reviewer.

There was indeed little to be hoped for from the general verdict of critical opinion when the only really favorable notice of his new volume came from a periodical of distinct ability indeed but of limited circulation; and when the only man who came forward earnestly to the support of the poet was a London tailor who had never read the writings of the author he had undertaken to champion. On the other hand, there were plenty to assail. One of the first to fall foul of him was 'The Literary Gazette.' The existence of that periodical is but little known now. Even then it was at the beginning of its downward career; but as has previously been pointed out, it still continued to be a power; it was still generally reckoned the leading critical weekly. Its editor, William Jerdan, had been concerned during his career in various

[1] 'Memoir,' Vol. I, pp. 95-96.

literary enterprises; but the main business of his life had been for some time the conduct of this periodical. In general terms he may be characterized as ordinarily a good-hearted but invariably fat-witted man. It shows the benefit of anonymousness, but is of itself the most damaging comment that can be made upon the business of reviewing, that such a literary judge should have been for years at the head of the most important critical weekly of the time. Jerdan's lack of mental qualifications was, however, more than made up by the abundance of his moral ones. In the management of 'The Literary Gazette' he was animated by the loftiest motives. This fact we know for a certainty, for he has told us so himself. In the account he furnished of his life he gave a fairly affecting portrayal of the unremitting and occasionally herculean efforts he put forth to discharge worthily his duties as a critic, so as to do equal and exact justice to all. He labored assiduously, to use his own words, "to cherish talent and to proclaim genius—to commingle the lesson of truth with the incitement to praise—to foster the aspirations of the young and pay the tribute due to older votaries in the path of authorship." It is not very surprising that any one animated by motives so exalted should in a world of imperfect creatures occasionally meet the fate of all pure-minded souls in having his efforts derided.

It has already been mentioned that Jerdan had been made the subject of a violent and rather coarse attack by Southey for the review he had written in 1830 of the volume by Charles Lamb entitled 'Album Verses.'

This was the first work which had come from the press of the young publisher, Moxon. For two years Jerdan brooded in silence over the onslaught made upon him by the poet laureate. Then he seized the occasion of another book issuing from the same house to relieve his feelings. This chanced to be Tennyson's second volume. The work had hardly come out when he proceeded to review it, or rather he used it largely to reply to the attack made upon him by Southey for his previous criticism of Lamb's verses. What possible connection he could find between the writings of the two men beyond the fact that they had the same publisher he does not tell us. What possible pretext there could be for putting their poetry in the same class was a puzzle too intricate to be solved by the reader of to-day. It certainly required unusual obtuseness of literary perception to discover the slightest similarity. Still in this particular qualification, Jerdan abounded. He could furthermore plead in his justification the example of Lockhart who had found Keats to be a disciple of Leigh Hunt.

But Jerdan on his own behalf was fully equal to this piece of imbecility. For pure unmitigated idiocy there are times when criticism surpasses the most sanguine expectations. This was one of them. Jerdan's review of Tennyson's new volume took up seven columns of 'The Literary Gazette."[1] Of his article about a third had not the remotest connection with the work ostensibly under review. It was given up to a consideration of the grievances of the editor in connection with his

[1] No. for December 8, 1832.

previous criticism of Lamb's 'Album Verses,' in which he had questioned the infinite beauty and excellence of this pretty slip-slop, as he now termed it. For so doing he had aroused against himself, he declared, the rage of all the members of the school to which that author belonged. These had hastened to pour out their impotence upon 'The Literary Gazette.' They not merely bespattered the paper from their little periodical vehicles, whence they could open their tiny batteries, but they actually procured Southey, as an old friend of Lamb's, to thunder some verses in the 'Times' at the reviewer. What earthly relationship this preliminary exhibition of wrath had to the work nominally under consideration was not apparent on the surface; but Jerdan was able to supply the missing link which formed the connection. He created a new school of poetry to which Lamb and Tennyson were both represented as belonging. This with great severity he called the Baa-Lamb School. In the following urbane way his notice of the work under review began:

"Mr. Alfred Tennyson," he wrote, "may be considered a pupil of a poetical school, to offer a fair and candid opinion of the merits and demerits of any one of whom, from the Dux of the highest to the Dunce of the lowest form, is sure to bring the whole about your ears, buzzing, hallooing, yelping, abusing, and pelting with all the fury of an incensed urchinry." This opening sentence indicated the general nature of the criticism which followed. Jerdan said that Tennyson had previously published a volume which

he remembered only to have seen through friendly reviews which hailed him as the most gifted bard of the time. "We thought," he continued, "the specimens did not support the judgment; but the writer was young and enthusiastic, evidently warm in the pursuit; and we have seen many worse débutants make very distinguished figures in their riper years. We therefore said nothing to daunt his ardor." This kindly attitude he felt that he could no longer maintain. Further mercy was out of place. In the volume under review this stern judge found something to admire and something to censure. As is usual in such cases the censure was out of all proportion to the admiration. It naturally exceeded it as much in intensity as it did in length. He damned with a sort of faint praise a number of pieces which were the least worthy of commendation. He specified as particularly deserving of censure the pedantry characterizing many pieces, or, as he expressed it, "the sad disorders of the imagination exhibited in allegories and classical paraphrases." 'The Lady of Shalott' was in his opinion a strange ballad without a perceptible object. At the end he quoted a passage from the beginning of 'Œnone,' which he spoke of as "the sheer insanity of versification." Low diet and sound advice, he thought, might eventually restore the patient. But in the meantime the critic felt it to be his duty to commit him to what his publication does not deserve to have—a madhouse cell. As the creation of the Baa-Lamb School had been a silly imitation of Jeffrey's Lake School and of 'Blackwood's' Cockney School, so his

advice to Tennyson to retire to an insane asylum was a still sillier imitation of Lockhart's previous advice to Keats to go back to his gallipots.

This was the severest criticism of the volume which appeared in any of the weekly and monthly periodicals of the time. But the inadequacy of the others was as manifest as the forcible feebleness of 'The Literary Gazette.' Most of the criticisms which the work received were of that perfunctory character which is sometimes as damaging in its effects as the most furious attack, and not unfrequently more so. They were all marked by the same wearisome repetition of the charges of obscurity and affectation and of the reprehensible use of obsolete words. For years criticism went on reproducing these particular accusations. They constituted the burden of the regularly recurring commonplaces of the stock censures that were dragged to the front during the whole period which elapsed between the volume of 1832 and the edition of 1842. Even after the appearance of the latter they were still made to do duty for a long while in certain quarters.

The charge of affectation in particular had to some extent waited upon the volume of 1830. But upon its successor special stress was laid for its exhibition of this failing by about all of the new weekly periodicals which were struggling into prominence. The parrot-like repetition of this same senseless criticism becomes at last wearying almost up to the point of nausea. Though the estimate of the work given by these new periodicals was in general more favorable than that of the oldest and most influential of their number, in

no case could it be termed cordial. 'The Atlas,' for instance, had welcomed the volume of 1830 with some warmth, though with little critical discernment. It had advanced of course the authorized remarks about the poet's affectation and his disposition to allow his thought to run riot in search of obsolete modes of utterance. Still it was gracious enough to admit that on the whole it was greatly pleased with Mr. Alfred Tennyson.[1] When, however, it came to the consideration of the poems of 1832, it was clearly not so much pleased. It proclaimed that it had been the first to introduce the previous volume to the public. It is proper to add that it now bestowed upon the second one a fair share of commendation. It gave the poet credit for genius. It quoted in part or in whole 'The Miller's Daughter,' 'Rosalind,' and 'The Death of the Old Year.' But a good deal of its notice was taken up with that particular sort of censure which was to rage unchecked for the next half-score years and even longer. Tennyson was declared to belong to a school that ran a constant risk of spoiling all its excellence by the varnish of affectation. Fault was specifically found with his taste for coining words that had a picturesque look upon paper, but really hurt the force of his meaning by distracting the attention from that to the garb in which it was clothed. A still greater fault found with him was his refining his metaphysics so extravagantly that while the poet believed that he was working in the subtle depths of passion, he was really wasting himself upon air. No illustrations were

[1] Vol. V, p. 411, June 27, 1830.

given of this fault. To determine what the critic meant must accordingly be left to the reader; for the reviewer had so refined his own metaphysics that he was himself incomprehensible.[1]

Not essentially different was the view taken by 'The Athenæum.' This periodical had now passed into other hands than those of the Apostolic band which had been concerned in its early management. Nevertheless it gave the volume what was on the whole a somewhat favorable though far from enthusiastic notice. It quoted with high praise a large proportion of 'The Miller's Daughter,' the whole of the 'New Year's Eve,' 'The Death of the Old Year,' and a part of 'Œnone.' But it devoted also a good deal of space to a denunciation of the poet's faults or assumed faults. Necessarily the ever recurring charge of affectation was prominent. "He takes," said the critic, "an unaccountable delight to the verge (nay, till he is often lost to us within the precincts) of unintelligibility." "Either what is antiquated," he continued, "or that which is palpable innovation (be it in thought, or expression, or orthography,) possesses an irresistible charm for him; and accordingly his poetry is marred, and its beauty disfigured and sometimes absolutely concealed, not only by discarded phrase and obsolete pronunciation, but by words newly compounded after the German model." Censure of some pieces was accordingly mingled with the praise given to others. "The poem of 'The Hesperides,'" the critic concluded by saying, "we confess, is beyond

[1] Vol. VII, p. 842, December 16, 1832.

us, and we will at once hand it over to Christopher North. Neither do we greatly care if he take charge of the allegorical poem, 'The Palace of Art.' "[1]

The two notices just considered were on the whole the most favorable ones which the volume received from the weeklies. Neither, as we have seen, was characterized by any display of enthusiasm. Even less so were some of the others. In the friendliest comments, if any can be called friendly, the note of critical depreciation is apparent. By several of the periodicals the work was ignored altogether. But the most striking and what to modern times will seem the most singular attitude taken towards the new work is its already mentioned assumed inferiority to its predecessor. Nor was this view confined entirely to literary critics. Hallam wrote to his friend that Rogers defended him publicly as the most promising genius of the time; but he added that the veteran poet thought the first volume was decidedly superior to the second. He expressed his surprise at such a view coming from such a quarter. Naturally he said that he could not comprehend it.[2] Yet in it Rogers apparently reflected a very widely entertained, if not the generally received opinion. Outside of the circle of his personal friends there is scarcely to be found at the immediate time any real recognition of the advance which had been made by the poet. In fact, the ordinary critical attitude taken on this point may be exemplified by the review in 'The Spectator.' This

[1] December 1, 1832.
[2] 'Memoir,' Vol. I, p. 92.

periodical had given a good deal of praise to the earlier volume.[1] Of course the usual attacks had been made upon his fondness for old words, his love for old modes of pronunciation, and furthermore upon the vicious and irregular system exhibited in the arrangement of his rhymes. But when it came to review the second venture, there was an entire alteration in its tone. "It does not appear to us," it said, "from a very attentive perusal of the volume that Mr. Tennyson has either consulted his fame by its publication or at all approached the beauties of his first publication." There are critics whose attentive perusal of a work has a more disastrous effect upon their judgment than a careless one. This is a case in point. The volume, it declared, seemed to be but an echo of the previous work, and that a faint one. It quoted 'Eleanore' as being the poem apparently most on an equality with those found in the former work. "The author," it concluded, "seems to have been studying some new model. He has grown far more shadowy and obscure; and in his attempts to seize upon beauty and power not of earth, he has, like Ixion, embraced a cloud."[2]

Essentially the same view is expressed in the brief notice of the work which appeared in 'Tait's Edinburgh Magazine' for January, 1833.[3] "Mr. Tennyson's new volume," it said, "contains many good and a few beautiful poems; but it scarcely comes up to our high-raised expectations of the author of *Poems chiefly Lyrical.* We must return to it more at leisure."

[1] August 21, 1830.
[2] December 15, 1832.
[3] Vol. II, p. 540.

Naturally the leisure was never found to return to it at all. A change of attitude had also come over 'The New Monthly Magazine.' In the review of the first volume the likeness of Tennyson to Keats had been distinctly pointed out by one of the few who were then admirers of the latter poet. That fact which had recommended it to the earlier critic had the opposite effect upon the later. The editorship of the magazine had now passed into the hands of Bulwer. It may or may not be that the review of the volume of 1832 which appeared in it was the work of that author; but as it reflected his sentiments there is every reason to believe that it was. At all events Tennyson many years after asserted it to have come from his pen.[1]

Bulwer was an admirer of the old school of poetry whose sway was now threatened with subversion. His review, like the preceding one in the same magazine, detected, while in this case it disapproved, the presence of the new spirit which was manifested in the verse under consideration. He held that Keats and Shelley were abominable models. Their genius scarcely redeemed their faults. It was more than doubtful, he asserted, if the former would ever rank with posterity among the classic names of the age. As a representative of this new school, Tennyson fell accordingly under the castigation of the critic. He was censured for his imitation of these writers whose originality was of the kind to be avoided. "There is a metaphysical poem in the volume," he said, "called 'The Palace of Art';—we shall only say of this edifice,

[1] R. Garnett's 'Life of William Johnson Fox,' 1910, p. 284.

that Shelley found all the materials;—'A Dream of Fair Women,'—a most conceited title, has also a strong *Shelleyan* savour. Other poems, called 'The Hesperides' and 'Œnone' again are of the best Cockney classic; and Keatesian to the marrow."

Of course Bulwer—or whoever was the reviewer—censured Tennyson for affectation. No critic of that time would have felt that he could go to bed happy if he had not resorted to that convenient word as a method of disguising the fact that he did not know what he was talking about. He quoted also the 'O Darling Room' and the lines to Christopher North. "The severity of the last poem," was his comment, "is really scalding; an infant of two years old could not be more biting." With all this, the criticism, though it cannot be called favorable, was not actually unfriendly. In a way Bulwer was then a half-hearted admirer of Tennyson. He exhibited in this review an altogether different attitude from that which later, unfortunately for himself, he was to assume. The hard language he had employed about the author was due, he declared at the conclusion, to the fact that he had more hopes of him than of most of his contemporaries. In their case he saw Folly sitting complacently in its fetters. But in Tennyson, who seemed to him in many respects the incarnation of modern poetry, it was genius struggling to escape. As a proof of this he quoted approvingly some of the pieces.[1]

More than enough has been furnished of the sort of hostile critical comment to which Tennyson's work

[1] Vol. XXXVII, pp. 69-74, January, 1833.

was subjected during this early period of his career. There was nothing exceptional about the time itself so far as the estimate taken of his writings was concerned. It extended more or less to the day of his death. Still no student of the poet's literary life can fail to be struck not only with his own fairly ridiculous sensitiveness to criticism, even to that which was but slightly unfavorable, but to the fact that he had at the outset to encounter so much that was unfavorable and often hostile. Tennyson, before he had reached middle age, had won his way to the foremost place among living English poets. He lived a great many years longer; but the commanding position he had then acquired, though often threatened, was never lost. Yet no man ever owed less than he to the aid of favorable criticism. Any complete record of his literary career will show conclusively that in the vast majority of instances, the reviewing fraternity followed, and often followed grumblingly, the popular taste instead of preceding and guiding it. Once and once only on the occasion of the publication of his first volume, his friends made an effort to forestall the judgment of the public. The sole result achieved was to retard his recognition and not to advance it. If it did not actually provoke, it gave increased virulence to the critical storm which burst out with violence. But there was in this experience nothing exceptional. When we come to consider the reception given to most of the several volumes he from time to time put forth, we find that on the appearance of each the professional critical estimate was rarely enthusiastic. In fact it

was usually more or less depreciatory, when not actually hostile. The exceptions to this state of things are merely sufficient in number to make more noticeable the rule.

It may be well to observe at this point that when the volume of 1832 was on the point of appearing, Tennyson decided to suppress a poem which he had destined to form its conclusion. This was 'The Lover's Tale,' written in his nineteenth year. Two of the three parts had been already printed when Tennyson, feeling, as he said later, the imperfection of the work, decided to withdraw it from publication. Against the resolution to exclude it Hallam earnestly, one might say violently, protested. "Don't give up the Lover's Tale," he wrote to Tennyson on the twentieth of November. "Heath is mad to hear of your intention, I am madder. You must be point-blank mad. It will please vast numbers of people. It pleases the wise. You are free from all responsibility for it's faults by the few lines of preface. Pray—pray—pray—change your mind again. I have ordered Moxon to stop proceedings till I hear from you again." But Tennyson was not to be turned from his purpose. Still the poem, though withdrawn at the time, was not entirely suppressed. The story of it and of his original conclusion not to publish it, he tells us himself in the preface to the poem as published in 1879. "One of my friends, however," he added, "who, boylike, admired the boy's work, distributed among our common associates of that hour some copies of these two parts, without my knowledge, without the omis-

sions and amendments which I had in contemplation, and marred by the many misprints of the compositor.'' It was the fortune of one of these copies to fall later into the hands of a not overscrupulous publisher. He determined to reprint it, and did so. This eventually led Tennyson to publish the poem thoroughly revised. With it in three parts was joined its concluding fourth part as a sequel. This was entitled 'The Golden Supper,' and was the work of his later years.

While the volume of 1832 was going through the press, Tennyson made an excursion up the Rhine from Rotterdam to Bingen. Early in the year he had received a gift of one hundred pounds from his aunt, Mrs. Russell. It was probably with that or with some of it that he was enabled to carry into effect the project of surveying the now familiar scenery of that river, but which Byron in the third canto of his 'Childe Harold' had for the first time brought vividly to the attention of his countrymen. So during the summer he went up to London and persuaded Hallam to accompany him on this trip. It was the year when the cholera was ravaging Europe. In consequence the two travellers underwent various experiences, certain of which could not have contributed to enjoyment. They were quarantined for a week on the Maas, moored by a muddy island on which were buried at night the corpses of those taken from the cholera ships on the river. On this journey, among other places they visited Cologne and Bonn, climbed the Drachenfels, and put up at the isle of Nonnenwerth at the old Benedictine convent which had been converted into

a hotel. On their return from Bingen, they avoided retracing the journey by the tame scenery of the lower Rhine, but went back by way of Aix-la-Chapelle and Brussels. On reaching England both repaired to Somersby. From there Hallam wrote to a friend: "We went up the Rhine for a month, and as we had little coin between us, talked much of economy; but the only part of our principles we reduced to practice was the reduction of such expenses as letter writing, etc." Tennyson himself commemorated certain details of this expedition in a poem already referred to, which, short as it was, he had ample reason to regret writing.

CHAPTER XII

LOCKHART'S REVIEW OF TENNYSON'S SECOND VOLUME

We are told by one of the dramatists of the period following the Restoration that hell has no fury like a woman scorned. However that may be, literature has no fury like a professional critic despitefully scouted. Never has this fact been more signally illustrated than in the case of Wilson and Lockhart. No two men were ever more reckless in their attacks upon others, more abusive in their personalities, more unrestrained in their own denunciatory utterances. Accordingly it is not strange to find that no two men were more keenly sensitive to attacks upon themselves. They exhibited their resentment not merely with little restraint in expression but with no attempt at disguise.

In 1818, appeared, for illustration, an anonymous pamphlet entitled 'Hypocrisy Unveiled.' It was a review of the recently founded 'Blackwood's Magazine.' The publisher it assailed by name, as well as Murray, his then London partner in the enterprise. Lockhart and Wilson were designated, respectively, by the titles given them in the so-called Chaldee Manuscript as the Scorpion and the Leopard. Their identity was, however, merely intimated; it was perhaps not positively known. The publishers men-

tioned by name wisely kept silence; but the two principal contributors of the objectionable personalities contained in the magazine were so enraged by the attack made that they revealed themselves as authors of the offences charged upon them, by each sending a challenge to the anonymous pamphleteer. Of course their action did not induce him to come out of his hiding-place. Instead he exultingly rejoined in a further attack in which he published the challenges he had received. "I really can recollect," wrote Murray to Blackwood, "no parallel to the palpable absurdity of your two friends. If they had planned the most complete triumph to their adversaries, nothing could have been so successfully effective."[1]

Wilson further was specially sensitive, were he deprived of the least modicum of praise to which in his own opinion he was entitled. Singular instances of this craving for flattering notices of himself and his works are revealed in his correspondence. In 1822 came out his work entitled 'Lights and Shadows of Scottish Life.' This was given to the veteran essayist and novelist, Henry Mackenzie, to review for 'Blackwood's Magazine.' The proof of the contemplated article was manifestly submitted to the author of the book. The reading of it filled him with something more than indignation. He wrote from his retreat at Kelso a violent letter to the publisher. In it he vented his fury both on the character of the criticism and of the critic. "I consider old M.," he amiably began, "to be the greatest nuisance that ever

[1] 'Memoir' of John Murray, Vol. I, p. 488.

infested any Magazine.'' The dull vile falsehoods, he went on to say, to which the old dotard gave vent, sprang however not so much from mendacity as from self-conceit and sheer incapacity. ''Miserable drivelling,'' ''execrable'' misstatement, gross and false misquotation from the work ''for a despicable purpose''—these are a few of the choice rhetorical gems with which he characterized special remarks of his critic. The foolish, false, and disgusting observations scattered by the ''old captious body'' through the article, made the whole of it, he said, actually loathsome—so loathsome that it ''gives me and Mrs. W. the utmost disgust.'' After these unimpassioned observations his concluding remarks are especially edifying. ''It is not,'' he wrote, ''as you well know, that I can possibly be such an ass as to dislike criticism.'' Obviously not, the words just quoted show. ''But this,'' continued he, ''is mere drivelling falsehood and misrepresentation—calculated to injure the book, I declare, even in my own eyes, and to do it the greatest injury with the public. It is the most sickening dose of mawkish misrepresentation I ever read.''[1]

Naturally, after this furious remonstrance from 'Blackwood's' indispensable contributor, Mackenzie's review of the book was not permitted to see the light. We cannot tell, therefore, what there was in it which produced this angry outburst. So far as inferences from certain passages in the letter as to its character are justifiable, it seems to have been far from a hostile criticism. At its possible worst, it could have been no

1 'William Blackwood and his Sons,' Vol. I, pp. 271-272.

more than a review of the sort so cherished by feeble men of not daring to condemn while not desiring to praise. But a highly eulogistic notice was the kind of one which Wilson demanded. The old essayist who had been asked to review his book had doubtless too much sense as well as self-respect to minister to the author's vanity in that way, and to pay the work a tribute which he evidently did not think it deserved then and nobody thinks now. In the place of it accordingly appeared a highly laudatory review of the volume in question. It reads as if it might have come from Wilson's own hands. Some of it probably did. It was certainly revised by him before being published, for it contains a note of his own. In fact, before its publication he intimated to the publisher the sort of criticism which he desired. "I do not object," he wrote, shortly after the letter just mentioned, "to a nice little eulogistic touch of censure now and then, but I must always do these with my own hand."[1] He exhibited indeed no hesitation in avowing his attitude towards criticism. Willing as he was to assail others, the sanctity of his own personality must be guarded. "Though averse to being cut up myself, I like to abuse my friends," he wrote in a later letter.[2]

If Wilson could get into the state of mind here described about a review from a veteran man of letters which, if in parts blundering, seems to have been as favorable on the whole as his work deserved, we can conceive something of the wrath he felt at reading the

[1] 'William Blackwood and his Sons,' Vol. I, p. 272.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 274.

little squib directed against "crusty, rusty, musty, fusty Christopher" by a young man not known outside of a limited circle. The audacity of the act was rendered the more distasteful from the change which had taken place in his own position. The half-score years which had gone by since Mackenzie had written his article had materially affected the estimate in which Wilson was held. Then he was rising in general repute; but his authority was not established. With the retirement of Jeffrey from the editorship of 'The Edinburgh Review' he had come to be widely considered as the reigning critic of the time. Naturally he was as much astounded by the presumption of the poet in attacking him as he was made indignant. It was, however, hardly consistent with his own position and dignity to display publicly then the annoyance and irritation he felt. Least of all could he manifest his resentment in his own magazine. That would be too plain an admission of the extent to which he had been galled by the lines addressed to himself. Fortunately for him there could be brought into play a much more effective agency than anything he himself could directly provide. At his command was his old friend and associate, the editor of 'The Quarterly Review.' Criticism from that periodical would carry far more weight with the public than anything which appeared in the northern magazine. To Lockhart, accordingly, was passed over the task of inflicting punishment upon the insolent stripling.

It would be utterly unwarranted by any positive knowledge we possess to assert that Wilson directly

inspired the attack made upon Tennyson in the 'Quarterly.' Certainly no evidence has ever been published even to suggest that it was at his instigation that Lockhart wrote his review. But with the intimacy and alliance existing between the two men, he could not have failed to be cognizant of Lockhart's intention, if he did not prompt his action. The editor of the 'Quarterly' doubtless needed no solicitation to undertake the business of chastening the assailant of his old companion in arms. But the attitude of Wilson, to be exhibited later, is sufficient to prove beyond question that the review of Tennyson met with his fullest concurrence, even if it was not written at his request. It is assuredly safe to say that had the lines addressed to Christopher North never appeared, either there would have been no review of the poet's work in the 'Quarterly' at all, or if there had been one, it would have been of a totally different character. Accordingly that periodical proceeded to add still another instance to the series of critical blunders which are strewn up and down its early pages. The same man who in 'Blackwood's' had told Keats to go back to his gallipots set out to carry on the traditions of the 'Quarterly' by inserting an attack of a similar nature upon Keats's legitimate successor, Tennyson.

It was in the number for April, 1833, that the review came out of the volume of poems dated that same year. Were there any real doubt as to the authorship of the scurrilous abuse which had characterized the so-called criticism of Keats in 'Blackwood's' fifteen years before, it would be removed by the opening

paragraph of the article on Tennyson. It began with a reference to the criticism of the earlier poet which had given a peculiar temporary notoriety to the 'Quarterly' at the period of its appearance, but has permanently added to its discredit in later times. That article—the work of John Wilson Croker—had been criticism of a particularly stupid sort. But while it followed the not unusual method of the anonymous reviewer, in being contemptuous as well as condemnatory, it contained nothing of the gross personal vilification which signalized the corresponding article in 'Blackwood's Magazine.' For the attack now made upon Tennyson a sort of provocation might fairly be alleged in the foolish retort he had made to the criticism of Wilson. But for the fat-wittedness which led Lockhart to follow in the footsteps of Croker by again assailing Keats there was neither sense nor excuse.

The extent of the critic's folly will not be fully appreciated unless one makes himself familiar with the situation then existing. Keats had died, clearly conscious of his great genius but as clearly under the conviction that it had not been given him to demonstrate it to the world. "Here lies one whose name was writ in water" were the deathbed words in which he expressed his belief that the little he had accomplished, compared with what he was sure he could have accomplished, would be insufficient to dissipate the storm of detraction which had gathered about his head. For a long while it seemed as if his prophecy would be realized. Not an edition of any one of his

poems appeared in England after the volume of 1820—the last published during his lifetime—till his works were brought out collectively in 1840 in a cheap form in William Smith's Standard Library. Few, too, were the references made to him in critical literature during the score of years that passed between those two publications. So unfamiliar indeed to professional critics was even his name that it was frequently spelled Keates.

It was the little knowledge then possessed of that poet outside of a limited circle, it was the consequent little demand for his works, which furnished Lockhart with a pretext for making a mock apology for Croker's previous review. With what seems now indescribable thick-headedness but which most of his readers doubtless then regarded as wit, he affected to believe that Keats had become a special favorite of the public, and that his poetry was circulated and read everywhere. He indulged in an ironical lament over the inability which had been displayed by the 'Quarterly' to foresee the unbounded popularity which that poet had unexpectedly gained. He therefore, to use his own language, took occasion to sing a palinode on the subject of 'Endymion.' "We certainly did not discover," he wrote, "in that poem the same degree of merit that its more clear-sighted and prophetic admirers did. We did not foresee the unbounded popularity which has carried it through we know not how many editions; which has placed it on every table; and, what is still more unequivocal, familiarized it in every mouth. All this splendour of fame, however, though we had not

the sagacity to anticipate, we have the candour to acknowledge; and we request that the publisher of the new and beautiful edition of Keats's works now in the press, with graphic illustrations by Calcott and Turner, will do us the favour and the justice to notice our conversion in his prolegomena." The malicious irony of this reference to the dead poet was undoubtedly entertaining to many men at that time. As we have seen, it had for its basis the fact that no complete edition of the works of Keats had as yet appeared in England; that indeed no such edition was procurable anywhere save as part of a volume published in Paris; and that while his fame was slowly making its way, it was making it very slowly; that consequently his poems were no more upon every one's table than were his words in every one's mouth; and that of course no such illustrated edition of his works as is here dwelt upon, had ever been contemplated, far less undertaken, by anybody. Lockhart clearly fancied that nothing of the sort would ever exist because it did not exist then.

It is not often given to the same man to distinguish himself by two such examples of crass incompetence of appreciation of a poet, whose greatness he could not comprehend, as in the article on Keats in 'Blackwood's Magazine' and by the further reference to him in the beginning of the article on Tennyson. For Lockhart, though far from being a man of genius, was a man of great ability. In many ways too he was of fine poetic taste and literary acumen. This makes it harder to comprehend how totally unconscious he was

of the genius of the writer he was assailing and how utterly unsuspicious of the agencies which were then at work to place Keats at no distant period among the very greatest of his contemporaries. But his previous achievements in criticism of the dead poet were now to be rivalled by his criticism of the living one. Credit indeed must be given to him for his sagacity in detecting the relationship of Tennyson to Keats in spite of his indisposition or perhaps of his incapacity to recognize the greatness of either. On the later poet he began his review in the same strain of ironical praise which he had bestowed upon the earlier. "This is," he said, "as some of his marginal notes intimate, Mr. Tennyson's second appearance. By some strange chance we have never seen his first publication, which, if it at all resembles its younger brother, must be by this time so popular that any notice of it on our part would seem idle and presumptuous; but we gladly seize this opportunity of repairing an unintentional neglect, and of introducing to the admiration of our more sequestered readers a new prodigy of genius—another and a brighter star of that galaxy or *milky way* of poetry of which the lamented Keats was the harbinger." Then followed the comments upon the latter poet which have just been quoted.

It was in the same strain of mock laudation with which Keats had been spoken of that Lockhart proceeded to notice the work under review and its author. Warned, he said, by his former mishap, wiser by experience, and improved as he hoped in taste, he now set out to offer Mr. Tennyson a tribute of unmingled

approbation. His present task would be therefore to bring together for the delight of his readers a few specimens of the poet's singular genius and to point out, now and then, some of the gems that irradiate his poetical crown. This was done by selecting a number of passages from the poems and dwelling upon them in a strain of pretended admiration. This would have been legitimate enough had not the verses been mangled and their meaning perverted in order to give point to the attack. So long as the purely ironical tone was maintained, the review, however unfair in its criticism and, in the light of subsequent events, however damaging to its author, is entertaining for its malice. But the moment the poet is assailed directly, the observations often degenerate into what is nothing more than a cheap abusiveness. There was not the slightest effort made to give any real conception of the nature of the work under examination. In fact the effort was made to prevent any such conception being gained. All the tricks to which disreputable criticism resorts were employed. The least valuable pieces were largely selected for extended comment. Lines and passages were wrenched from the context explaining and modifying them, so as to give a pretext for the employment of what may be designated as a sort of horse-raillery. In truth, the review, taken as a whole, is a peculiarly bad specimen of a bad class; for while some of it is witty, it is dishonest throughout and at times little more than vulgarly vituperative.

The article concluded with quoting in full the lines to Christopher North and commenting upon them and

the attitude towards criticism displayed by the poet. It was for the sake of this one piece that the review had been really written. If anything were needed to render it morally certain that, in this criticism of Tennyson's second volume, Lockhart was acting as the mouthpiece of Wilson, it would be the disproportionate attention which was given to this little poem of nine lines taken out of a volume of one hundred and sixty-three pages. To it alone were devoted two of the fifteen pages which made up the whole of the review. It was, he said, one of "two pieces of lighter strain which the volume affords." Accordingly he purposed to delight his readers with the "severe retaliation on the editor of the Edinburgh magazine which, it seems, had not treated the first volume of Mr. Tennyson with the same respect that we have, we trust, evinced for the second." Had the review of the whole work been as honest as it was dishonest, this would have been a thoroughly justifiable retort. As it is, this article in its entirety deserves, as FitzGerald said of Croker's previous article on Keats, to be bound up with every edition of the poet as a standing warning to critics.

But before entering upon the consideration of these lines to Christopher North, Lockhart seized with eagerness upon another little poem in the collection in which Tennyson had laid himself peculiarly open to attack. This was the one entitled 'O Darling Room.' Special attention was called to it by printing the whole of it with a running comment on its text. The reviewer had in this piece the best justification for the malice

he displayed. As this poem is no longer found in any authorized edition of the poet's works, it is given here precisely as printed in the 'Quarterly,' where certain words and syllables were intentionally italicized. The poem, began Lockhart, "is elegant and playful; it is a description of the author's study, which he affectionately calls his *Darling Room.*" Then follow the lines as they appear in the review:

O darling room, my heart's delight;
Dear room, the apple of my sight;
With thy two couches, soft and white,
There is no room so exquis*ite;*
No little room so warm and bright,
Wherein to read, wherein to write.

For I the Nonnenwerth have seen,
And Oberwinter's vineyards green,
Musical Lurlei; and between
The hills to Bingen I have been,
Bingen in Darmstadt, where the *Rhene*
Curves towards Mentz—a woody scene.

Yet never did there meet my sight,
In any town to left or right,
A little room so exquis*ite,*
With *two* such couches soft and white;
Not any room so warm and bright,
Wherein to read, wherein to write.

This distinctly dreadful poem has probably never had a friend to say anything in its favor. By it Tennyson gave a sort of pretext for the title of "School-Miss Alfred," which Bulwer in an anonymous work applied to him later; though as we shall see, he came out of

the conflict which ensued with the feeling that he had been in the gripe of an opponent who bore a closer resemblance to a grizzly bear than to a schoolgirl. Assuredly, however, the treasure-house of namby-pambyism never had a better representative specimen of its contents than this poem. It is so bad of its kind that it fairly deserves the title of good.

To seize upon these two little pieces as fairly representative of the volume was however worse than a crime in criticism; it was a stupendous literary blunder. Had Tennyson been the poetaster Lockhart tried to give the impression of his being, there might have been a pretence that he deserved the sarcasm which was lavished upon his productions, unfair as it would have been even then under the conditions given. Unfortunately for the reviewer, Tennyson was very far from being a poetaster. Never was he so regarded then or later. Never could he have been termed so, save by envious men who had approved themselves fully entitled to the appellation. Accordingly, as things turned out, it was more than inappropriateness that characterized his article. It was inept beyond the justifiable limits of captious blundering. Few professional reviewers there are who do not perpetrate at times literary criticisms of which later they come to be ashamed themselves; or if they have not enough sense for that, they come to learn that their performances have brought mortification to their friends and hardly concealed glee to their enemies. But it is doubtful if in the annals of literary history two grosser examples of critical blundering can be found than in

Lockhart's article on Keats in 'Blackwood's Magazine' for 1817 and in the article on Tennyson in 'The Quarterly Review' for 1833. It is a heavier burden to carry down to posterity than even a far greater man than he could well bear. Lockhart lived long enough to regret for his own sake the composition of these two effusions. He lived long enough to see the two men whom he had attacked lifted in public estimation to a pinnacle to which it was hopeless for him even to venture to aspire.

For the moment, however, the triumph remained with him. Though the influence of the great quarterlies was then beginning to decline, it was still potent, more potent than that of the other agencies which were coming to displace it. By it were still affected the opinions of a great body of cultivated men. Its dicta were accepted as gospel by thousands of readers who honestly supposed they had minds of their own. There is little danger of our underrating the effect Lockhart's article had in confirming and intensifying the tone of depreciatory criticism which had begun to show itself in many of the minor periodicals of the time. To this effect Tennyson's own action contributed. The general character of the criticism to which he was subjected as well as his own behavior under it naturally come up now for consideration.

CHAPTER XIII

THE TEN YEARS' SILENCE—FIRST HALF
1832-1837

From no quarter of much influence was warm praise accorded to Tennyson's second venture. On the contrary, it had met with almost universal disparagement, none the less potent in its effect upon the public because of its incompetence; for it appeared in an age when the practice of reading reviews of books instead of the books themselves had at last fully established itself. The volume of poems had, as we have seen, been made the object of hostile and occasionally virulent attack from numerous quarters, and particularly from the most influential critical weekly of the time. But far more damaging than all these combined was Lockhart's review. He who has not made himself familiar with the power which the two great quarterlies still continued to wield can little comprehend the effect wrought by this article upon the estimation in which Tennyson soon came to be held. It lasted all through the fourth decade of the century. It extended into the decade following. It did not even die out entirely after Tennyson's reputation had begun to carry everything before it. Echoes of it continued to appear until the poet was so effectually established in the regard of his countrymen that it was no longer felt safe even

by the envious, the malignant, and the intellectually feeble to avow publicly their hostility.

At the time itself, however, there was no restraining influence of this sort. Lockhart's article set the fashion which largely prevailed during the years immediately succeeding its appearance, either of depreciating the poet or of treating him as altogether unworthy of consideration. There have been occasional efforts put forth in these latter days to designate this review as a sportive exhibition of what is termed chaff, somewhat malicious to be sure, but on the whole laughable. Clearly no such impression was intended by the writer; no such impression certainly was then made on the reader. It did not seem such to Tennyson's indignant friends and admirers. Nor even did it seem such to indifferent onlookers. They too felt its gross injustice. The fact that a particular work did not sell largely did not impress them as a decisive factor in settling its merits. "The article on Tennyson in the *Quarterly,*" said 'The Athenæum,' "is strangely provocative of comment. No sane man imagines that Tennyson is the Homer which the *Westminster* affected to believe; but he has much fine poetry about him; and if we are to give the name of poets only to those whose works are illustrated by Turner and Calcott, then Wordsworth is no poet, neither is Wilson.'"[1]

Others again regarded Lockhart's attack unfavorably in contrast with the criticism in 'Blackwood' which Tennyson had foolishly resented. This feeling

[1] 'Athenæum' for April 13, 1833, p. 234.

comes out distinctly in an article on reviewing which appeared in the first number of 'The Oxford University Magazine.' It was in March, 1834, that this particular periodical began. It did not overlive a year. In it attention was called to the different character of the reviews of Tennyson which had appeared respectively in the two Tory organs. "Compare," it said, "the article in the Magazine with that in the Quarterly Review. Here virulent and even coarse abuse; no mitigation and no praise of any sort; there ridicule where ridicule was due—praise in its right place; the best things extracted for commendation—the worst for blame; all fair and above-board. No one now doubts which was the fairer; if Alfred Tennyson is still more laught at than wept over, it is for the same reason that the philosophy of Democritus was more easily learnt than that of Heraclitus; anybody can laugh, some eyes are naturally dry."

The very words contained in this protest against the character of the article in the 'Quarterly'—that Tennyson was more laught at than wept over—bear witness to the effect it had had in covering him with ridicule. Its sentiments were echoed and re-echoed by the members of that far from limited class of readers of little taste and less discernment, who, lacking entirely the courage of their own convictions, exhibit a desperate hardihood in standing up for the convictions of others. It became the fashion to speak disparagingly of the poet whenever it was thought worth while to speak of him at all. Men who were disposed to give expression to their admiration of him

were apt to do so with bated breath. A letter of Arthur Stanley reveals incidentally this attitude. It was written in September, 1834, from the rectory of Hurstmonceaux. In it he says that Julius Hare, with whom he was staying, "often reads to us in the evening things quite new to me, for instance (tell it not in Gath), A. Tennyson's *Poems.*"[1] The fear of the Philistines did not prevent the future dean of Westminster, though then only a boy, from liking much that he heard. But this sort of courage could hardly be expected of the mass of men. The followers of Dagon were not merely kept from caring about the poet but were deprived of the disposition to become familiar with his writings. This feeling naturally extended to persons who would have been fairly certain to admire his work, had they once come to read it.

The attack in the article did not indeed hurt Tennyson in the eyes of the chosen circle which had early gathered about him. As his decriers had formed their opinion of his poetry not from reading it, but from reading a particular review of it; so to some extent the adherents of Tennyson largely retorted in kind. His admirers, far from heeding Lockhart's criticism, often disdained even to look at it. Unfortunately for the reputation of the poet his readers were few, while the readers of the 'Quarterly' were many. Illustrations abound on every side both of the fervor of his partisans and of the ignorance and indifference of the general public. For instance, Fanny Kemble tells us of the intense admiration she and her family felt for

[1] 'Memoir,' Vol. I, p. 206.

Tennyson's poetry in these early days of his authorship; and of the indignation and scorn with which they received the slightest word of adverse criticism. The contrary state of mind then existing is brought out distinctly in a story she relates in the 'Records of a Girlhood."[1] From it we can get a fairly good conception of the attitude taken by the admirers of the poet as well as that of those who obtained all their knowledge of him from the article in the 'Quarterly.' "I remember," she wrote, "Mrs. Milman, one evening at my father's house, challenging me laughingly about my enthusiasm for Tennyson, and asking me if I had read a certain severely caustic and condemnatory article in the *Quarterly* upon his poems. 'Have you read it?' said she; 'it is so amusing! Shall I send it to you?' 'No, thank you,' said I; 'have you read the poems, may I ask?' 'I cannot say that I have,' said she, laughing. 'Oh, then,' said I (not laughing), 'perhaps it would be better that I should send you those.' "

The person who is designated as Mrs. Milman could hardly have been other than the wife of the future historian and dean of St. Paul's, in whose play of 'Fazio' the actress had early in 1831 achieved great success in the part of Bianca. But the conversation could not have taken place much before the end of 1836 at best, and it may have been a good deal later; for Fanny Kemble left England for America before the publication of Lockhart's article and did not return from this country till near the close of the year

[1] p. 184.

just mentioned. A review, the memory of which could last for so long a time as this, must have produced a profound impression on many minds. Certain it is that this atmosphere of disparagement continued to dwell about the poet for many years to come. In later days when Tennyson's name and fame filled the whole land, when periodicals were eager to pay the highest of prices for his most ordinary productions, his old Cambridge associates were wont to contrast the respect if not enthusiasm which waited upon his poorest achievement with the ridicule which the early believers in his genius encountered on almost every side. In 1859 Stephen Spring-Rice, one of the band which had surrounded the poet at the university, expressed his astonishment at the change which had taken place in public opinion. "I hear," he wrote in a letter to a friend, "that McMillan has given Alfred £250 for a poem to come out in the next number of his new magazine. What a change! I sometimes feel a sort of amazed perplexity, reaching across a few years to pluck a fragment of the past to compare it with the present. It seems an unreality to recall old times at Cambridge when all the world was ready to laugh at us for our faith in Alfred and to compare it with his present popularity."[1]

This attitude of indifference or hostility on the part of the public had undoubtedly been caused largely by criticism, especially by that of 'The Quarterly Review.' For its long continuance, however, Tennyson himself must be held almost wholly responsible. His literary

[1] 'Mrs. Brookfield and her Circle,' Vol. II, p. 482.

activity did not cease with the appearance of his second volume, though in all probability it is likely to have been curtailed. What did cease was the publication of the poems he then wrote. This course of action, or rather of inaction, which he adopted, was a fatal mistake. One consequence of the mistake was that the general recognition of his genius was distinctly retarded. Tennyson's repute, high in a very limited circle, would speedily have extended to the world at large, had the publication of successive productions brought his name to its attention. A far more serious consequence was a failure in the quantity if not the quality of the work he produced; for, as has been said, though an author may go on composing as good prose or even better until an age is reached when life is no longer so much enjoyed as it is endured, it is not so with the writer of verse. In 1835 Tennyson was twenty-six years old. Before that date no small proportion of the poems had been written which contributed specifically to the success of the edition of 1842. But though composed thus early, they never travelled beyond the circle of his personal friends. To the world at large he would not give them. The result has already been indicated in the delay of the appreciation of his genius by the public, and too probably by the loss of much fine work which he would have written under its encouragement. Had Tennyson then continued to go on publishing, his early career would have undergone distinct change. He had learned by experience how unsubstantial is the reputation conferred by favorable criticism; he would

equally have learned how slight is the injury wrought by unfavorable criticism in the face of continuous great production. In that case the article in the 'Quarterly' would speedily have had at the time itself a more damaging effect upon the reputation of the review and the reviewer than upon the reputation of the poet. Consequently the only successful answer to the critic was not merely to write but to print. There were not wanting those who were anxious that he should take this course. In the latter half of 1834 his brother Frederick, then in Italy, wrote to him urging him to publish the following spring. This he would not do. Lack of health, lowness of spirits, were the reasons alleged for the refusal. He thus played directly into the hands of his depreciators.

Had Hallam lived, his influence might have been sufficient to overcome Tennyson's reluctance to try once more his fortune with the public; for no opinion was so potent as his with the poet. But Hallam was dead. To entreaties from others he refused to listen. There was no encouragement in England, he believed, for poetic production. The son tells us that his father was so far persuaded that the English people would never care for his verse that he was not disposed to write, at all events not to publish. The atmosphere of his own country he looked upon as so unsympathetic that he at one time half resolved to live abroad in Jersey, or in the south of France, or in Italy.[1] There is a letter he wrote undated—but probably belonging to 1840 or 1841—to a friend of his residing in Florence,

[1] 'Memoir,' Vol. I, p. 97.

telling him that he had sometimes tried, though without effect, to persuade his family to live abroad.[2] It was the result of this belief of his and his consequent attitude that with the exception of the contributions already mentioned, to the Annuals—and these wrung from him rather than contributed—nothing of Tennyson's was printed during the ten years which followed the publication of the volume of 1832. So far as his reputation at the time was concerned, it has already been described as a fatal mistake; to some extent indeed it may have affected his reputation for all time. For his inaction belonged to that period of life in the career of a great poet when his intellectual activity is most in evidence and the result of it usually most successful.

Many have been the attempts to account for this prolonged silence; various have been the reasons given for it. Two of these explanations have appeared frequently. One is that his grief for the death of Hallam paralyzed for a long period all effort. As a matter of fact, the loss of his friend stimulated his poetical activity. A more plausible though equally worthless explanation of his failure to come before the public is that it sprang from his desire to perfect himself in his art, and his determination not to appear in print until that result had been satisfactorily achieved. Both these considerations may perhaps have had some slight influence upon his course of action. It is possible indeed that Tennyson may have tried to persuade himself that they had great influence.

[2] 'Memoir,' Vol. I, p. 178.

But they were certainly never controlling ones. Too much stress indeed cannot be placed upon their futility. No far-fetched or elaborate explanations of this sort are necessary. No one can understand Tennyson's conduct throughout his whole career who does not recognize his abnormal sensitiveness to criticism. It mattered little or nothing how despicable was the source from which it came. This sensitiveness was more than morbid; it partook almost of the nature of actual disease. It was manifest from his earliest years. Even in the admiring circle which gathered about him in his college days, it was understood that when he read a poem no words of critical censure were to come from his hearers. The same infirmity clung to him in later life when the greatest of his contemporaries were the loudest in his praises; when to him belonged the countenance of the mighty as opposed to the carpings of those who could do little more than make faces; when indeed dissent from his supreme poetical pre-eminence was scarcely heard from any quarter entitled to consideration.

But even then the poet's sensitiveness did not desert him. No writer, to be sure, is likely to read hostile criticism with unmixed pleasure. But many authors read it with indifference. More than that, they not unfrequently read it with contempt, when they recognize it as the product of stupidity, envy, or malice. Such, however, was never the case with Tennyson. Even in the height of his fame the sting of the puniest literary insect gave him as much pain as the applause of the loftiest intellect gave him pleasure. It is

probably safe to say that the pain it gave him was greater. He himself admitted this fact. He was so sensitive to hostile criticism that "I have heard him say," remarked one of his friends, "all the praise he had ever received didn't outweigh for the moment a spiteful and unkindly criticism, even though the criticism (he once added) was directed against the straightness of his toe-nail."[1] This sensitiveness he himself recognized as a weakness; he was in a way ashamed of it; but he could not escape from it. He knew as a matter of fact that there are men by whom it is discreditable to be praised; that disparagement is the highest compliment it is in their power to pay. But while he could see this, he could not feel it. He knew he ought to rejoice in the censure of criticasters; but he did not rejoice. "What is the gadfly of irresponsible criticism to *you?*" said to him one of his visitors, while he was at the height of his fame. "How should *you* mind?" "But I do mind," was the quick rejoinder, as of an inconsolable child.[2] Consequently, however contemptible was the source from which the attack came, no matter how impotent was the hand which hurled the dart, the wound it inflicted festered. It is hard for most of us to recognize the ability of the petty nature to inflict pain upon the higher. The most wretched of poetasters, writhing under the sense of his inferiority, could feel assured that his attack, however powerless to affect the poet's reputation with

[1] 'Memoir,' Vol. II, p. 86.
[2] Miss E. R. Chapman in 'The Review of Reviews' for November, 1892.

the public, could be relied upon to cause suffering to the poet himself, if it chanced to meet his eye.

There was a partial justification for this sensitiveness, however absurd it may seem, in the constantly repeated absurdity of the criticism received. All through his ten years of silence there was a steady uniformity in the character of the charges brought against Tennyson's work. They were echoed and re-echoed, furthermore, down to the middle of the century and even later. In the account of the volume of 1832, it has already been recorded that again and again he was taken to task specifically for "affectation." This accusation fairly ran rampant in the criticism of his early writings. For at least a score of years it was never omitted when any pretext could be devised for lugging it in. It seems to have made its first public appearance in 'Blackwood's Magazine'; at all events its occurrence there gave it standing. Having gained a foothold in that periodical, it was repeated with wearisome iteration by every critic of the time. It was a fairly safe charge to bring; for it was vague. It saved all trouble of thinking. It is manifestly clear that many and probably most who used it had not the slightest idea of what they meant by it; for at the time there were others against whom the same accusation was brought. Accordingly it is none too easy for the modern reader to comprehend what the bringer of the charge manifestly did not. Still as commonly understood, at least as then frequently stated, it seems to have consisted largely in three things. First, there was the poet's asserted

practice of making Greek compounds out of honest Saxon phrases. They were joined together so as to seem one word instead of being kept apart so as to form two. Consequently there was no small number of compounds such as *altarthrone, Maymorning, mountainstream, lilygarlands, cloverhills, turretstairs,* and particularly a large collection of those beginning with the word *summer,* such as *summerflowers, summermoon, summerplain, summerpride, summervault, summerview,* and *summerwoods.* This was due, as Tennyson himself said late in life, to an absurd aversion he had at that time to hyphens. This aversion did not last long, and the practice was abandoned after the publication of his first volume. But of itself it manifestly had not the slightest weight in determining the value of the poetry as poetry.

A second evidence of affectation was the employment of archaic or obsolete or unusual words. These Tennyson's familiarity with our earlier literature led him occasionally to introduce. As with them the critic was usually not acquainted, he was led by his ignorance to regard them with peculiar disfavor. He seemed to feel it a sort of personal affront that his author should be familiar with something he himself knew nothing about. But the third and the most common of the acts which subjected him to the charge of affectation was that he printed his words as no one had ever printed them before. He had, it was asserted, so much more faith in the length of his readers' ears than in their quality,—it was a faith fully justified in the case of certain of his critics—that he took pains

to provide at his own care and cost the music of his verse by accenting the final *ed* of the past participle, when it was to be pronounced as a separate syllable. It is obvious that the practice censured is, like the first, a peculiarity of printing and not of expression. Like that, too, it has no bearing upon the value of the verse as verse.

One however would infer from the frequency with which this purely conventional proceeding is mentioned that critical imbecility had exalted it into a matter of dearest concern and direst consequence. It finds expression in article after article which appeared during the ten years of silence. Even after the publication of the edition of 1842, it turns up at first not infrequently. It is found even in John Forster's review of the poems in 'The Examiner.' He observed there that the affectation in the way of printing had been quietly dropped. This charitable view was not taken by all others. The asserted affectation still continued to be insisted upon. With the growing fame of the poet this once prevalent kind of criticism generally disappeared. Still it was always liable to turn up if the reviewer had nothing else to say when he had undertaken the task of finding fault. It is occasionally heard even in our own time; for few things have the vitality of feeble criticism. But under any conception of what was meant by the term "affectation," altogether too much stress was laid upon it. Poe, in speaking with a good deal of scorn of the method of decrying impliedly the higher merits of an author by insisting upon the lower, drew one

of his illustrations of the practice from remarks of this kind made upon the poet. "Tennyson," he wrote, "perceiving how vividly an imaginative effect is aided, now and then, by a certain quaintness judiciously introduced, brings the latter, at times, in support of his most glorious and most delicate imagination;—whereupon his *brother* poets hasten to laud the imagination of Mr. Somebody, whom nobody imagined to have any, '*and* the somewhat affected quaintness of Tennyson.'"

Two other charges there were which frequently appeared in the criticism of Tennyson during this fourth decade and even later. They are apparently contradictory. One is that he was obscure; the other that he failed in the exhibition of profound reflectiveness. Contradictory as they might seem, they flourished vigorously side by side. The former turns up with a fair degree of frequency; the latter was heard rather more often. It was not uncommon to have it asserted that Tennyson concealed his lack of ideas behind a gorgeous raiment of words. It was in a measure a just penalty for his own one-time characterization of Byron's poetry as rhetoric, that he himself should have been made later the recipient of this same sort of cheap critical comment. It was intimated again and again that he lacked Thought—it was invariably thought with a capital letter in which it was implied that he was deficient. This want of thought was much deplored by critics who had somehow got the impression that they themselves were in the habit of thinking.

There seems indeed to be a belief among many that poetry, to be really great, must be surcharged with profound thought. Verse which lacks this quality can never be deemed of a high order. Now thought in the finest and highest sense of the word is always likely to occur in great poetry. But it is not necessary to its existence, nor to the effect produced by it. In truth, the passages which require the least intellectual exertion on the part of the reader are very frequently those which make the most powerful appeal to the heart. For the poet it is amply sufficient to utter in a way no one else can that which we all think and feel but for which none of us are able to find adequate expression. The great artist comes along and says for us what we say clumsily or at best unimpressively. He says it too in such a way that it never has to be said again. The idea has had its definite setting. The history of scores of the most famous poems prove the truth of this contention. It is in the power of genius alone to lift the common out of the region of the commonplace and clothe it with imperishable beauty. It cannot be maintained that 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso,' with their opposing views of life, convey observations which are peculiarly profound. Few of the great elegiac poems contain reflections that startle us by their novelty or impress us by their depth. To do anything of the sort is not their business. That is to give utterance to sentiments which are common to all of us but which are for the first time expressed in words that all of us feel.

There is nothing, for instance, in Gray's 'Elegy in

a Country Churchyard' which is novel or startling in the way of a contribution to thought. There is not a sentence in it which cannot be comprehended by any one at a single reading. There are in it no allusions to perplexing problems of life or duty or destiny. The reflections it embodies are such as would occur to any one who reflected at all. Yet no poem of its character, perhaps no short poem of any character, ever attained a popularity so immediate and has retained it so unbrokenly during all the revolutions of taste which have gone on since its publication. Gray himself was so conscious that there was in the 'Elegy' nothing which had not been thought and felt and said by thousands that he was a good deal astounded and apparently somewhat disgusted by the phenomenal success which at once waited upon it. He considered it as being little more than a collection of commonplaces. There was nothing in it, he said, which any one might not have uttered. In one sense this was true. What he failed to take into consideration was that the reflections we all make and the feelings we all entertain it requires genius to convey in a permanent and effective form—the felicity of expression, the beauty which make them linger in the memory and cause them to become part of the imperishable riches of the literature of the language in which they appear.

The foolish criticism of the various kinds here specified painfully affected Tennyson's peculiarly sensitive nature. To a man so constituted the ill reception accorded to his second venture had an effect which it is almost impossible for the ordinary writer

to conceive. He had described the poet as dowered not only with the love of love and the hate of hate, but also with the scorn of scorn. If this last attribute be essential to the poetic nature, no one was ever more signally lacking in it than himself. After the generally hostile criticism the volume of 1832 had received, but more especially after the attack in a periodical wielding the wide influence of the 'Quarterly,' he was averse to having his name brought before the public in any form, even indeed for praise. A singular illustration of this state of mind comes to light in connection with criticism of which there will be occasion to speak later in detail. He had heard from a friend that John Stuart Mill was going to review him. Furthermore, he was going to review him favorably. Against any action of the sort Tennyson protested. "It is the last thing I wish for," he wrote to Spedding. "I would," he continued, "that you or some other who may be friends of Mill would hint as much to him. *I do not wish to be dragged forward again in any shape before the reading public at present,* particularly on the score of my old poems, most of which I have so corrected (particularly 'Œnone') as to make them much less imperfect, which you who are a wise man would own if you had the corrections."[1] The italics here are the poet's own.

In the generally unfavorable criticism to which he was subjected during the years immediately following the publication of the volume of 1832, there was occasionally a half-hearted recognition of his genius

[1] 'Memoir,' Vol. I, p. 145.

based evidently not so much on the critic's appreciation of it as on his appreciation of the fact that behind the poet was a body of small but earnest and able admirers. In 1833 Allan Cunningham contributed to 'The Athenæum' a series of papers upon the literature of the preceding fifty years. Towards the conclusion he gave an account of the younger writers. These articles were subsequently collected and published in a volume. The criticism it contains is usually of the most commonplace character. To us now, the work, however, is interesting for the cautious way in which it dealt with Tennyson, its careful repetition of the current critical cant about his language and expression, but above all for the acknowledgment it makes of the existence of a band of men who had more insight than their contemporaries. "Alfred Tennyson," wrote Cunningham, "has a happy fancy; his originality of thought is sometimes deformed by oddity of language; and his subject has not unfrequently to bear the weight of sentiments which spring not naturally from it. He has lyrical ease and vigour, and is looked upon by sundry critics as the chief living hope of the Muse."

There was during this period one specific piece of criticism, of which Tennyson was made the subject, that is worth recording here, because singularly enough it has been frequently cited as an evidence of the high appreciation in which he was beginning to be held at that early time. It is a sort of appreciation from which a man of sense might well pray to be delivered. Coleridge had died in 1834. In May, 1835,

appeared two volumes of specimens of his 'Table Talk' under the editorship of his nephew and son-in-law, Henry Nelson Coleridge. It is too often the misfortune of a man of genius that his foolishest observations are recorded and cherished as evidence of almost superhuman insight. Coleridge's table talk is an interesting collection of his utterances on all sorts of subjects, full of wisdom and of unwisdom, containing reflections of profoundest significance and of keenest appreciation intermixed with the display of the most senseless prejudices and at times of astounding ignorance. In this work under date of April 24, 1833, he is represented as paying his respects to the poet in the following words. "I have not," he said, "read through all Mr. Tennyson's poems, which have been sent to me; but I think there are some things of a good deal of beauty in what I have seen. The misfortune is, that he has begun to write verses without very well understanding what metre is. Even if you write in a known and approved metre, the odds are, if you are not a metrist yourself, that you will not write harmonious verses; but to deal in new metres without considering what metre means and requires, is preposterous. What I would, with many wishes for success, prescribe to Tennyson,—indeed without it he can never be a poet in act,—is to write for the next two or three years in none but one or two well-known and strictly defined metres, such as the heroic couplet, the octave stanza, or the octo-syllabic measure of the Allegro and Penseroso. He would, probably, thus get imbued with a sensation, if not a sense, of metre,

without knowing it, just as Eton boys get to write such good Latin verses by conning Ovid and Tibullus. As it is, I can scarcely scan his verses."

This pretentious piece of advice has been given here in full not because it is intrinsically of the slightest earthly importance, but because on the one hand it has been spoken of as conveying an appreciative tribute to Tennyson himself; and on the other hand because of the various attempts that have been made to reconcile its oracular utterances with its complete failure to conform to later fact, and with its assumption of superiority in a matter in which the speaker, great as was the genius he possessed, was distinctly inferior to the writer upon whose performance he was commenting. The whole criticism is indeed on a level with some of Coleridge's linguistic and even literary pronouncements in which the extreme of ignorance was often combined with the extreme of positive assertion. Tennyson, we know, saw and read this passage. It is hardly necessary to observe that he did not follow the patronizing advice given in it; that for the next two or three years he did not confine himself to the three measures prescribed for his guidance, though unless he did so, he was assured that he would never become "a poet in act." In spite of his disregard of this volunteered counsel, there is a general impression that he did become a poet—a much greater one indeed than his counsellor. Coleridge's critical discernment was in this instance about equal to his prophetic vision. His appreciation was no more illuminating than it was enthusiastic.

The only critical utterance of this period on the productions of the poet which still remains worth reading after the lapse of four fifths of a century, came from a quarter from which it would hardly have been expected. It was the work of John Stuart Mill. Tennyson had protested, as we have seen, against the publication of this review, even though he had heard it was to be of a favorable character. If his objection ever came to the ears of the writer, it had no effect whatever upon his action. The name of Mill indeed might seem to be one that would not suggest a man who would be inclined to sympathize with the peculiar characteristics which distinguish Tennyson's verse. But nowhere was there published then—perhaps it is safe to add nowhere has there been published since—a more appreciative criticism of the work which the poet had up to this time produced, a keener and more discriminating study of its merits and defects than can be found in the article which the future political economist then published. The criticism appeared in the second number of 'The London Review,'[1] a short-lived quarterly which had been started in 1835 in consequence of the dissatisfaction of the so-called philosophical radicals with the course of the 'Westminster.' In the following year, however, the two periodicals were united. Not merely for its coming from the man it did, but for the character of its criticism, this article merits a detailed examination.

"Towards the close of 1830," Mill began, "appeared a small volume of poems, the work of a young and

[1] Vol. I, p. 402, July, 1835.

unknown author, and which, with considerable faults (some of them of a bad kind), gave evidence of powers such as had not for many years been displayed by any new aspirant to the character of a poet. The first publication was followed in due time by a second in which the faults of its predecessor were still visible, but were evidently on the point of disappearing; while the positive excellence was not only greater and more uniformly sustained, but of a higher order." In these opening sentences, the general tone of Mill's criticism was indicated. When it came to detail, he pointed out as Tennyson's most characteristic excellence the power of scene-painting in the higher sense of the term—that is, not the cheap representation of external phenomena, but the power of creating scenery to harmonize with the state of mind of the individual portrayed. His principal illustration is the sufficiently marked one of the poem in the volume of 1830 entitled 'Mariana.' In this piece the love story at the base of it is suggested in the refrain alone; even in that it is only suggested, it is not detailed. The whole strength of the writer is put forth in the portrayal of the desolation of the moated grange to correspond with the wretchedness and gloom of the woman abandoned by her lover. The level waste, the blackened waters of the sluice, the decay of all objects pertaining to the once busy household life, the flower-pots crusted by the encroaching moss, the creaking of doors upon rusty hinges, the shriek of the mouse behind the mouldering wainscot, these and numerous other details impart to the situation of the deserted

maiden a sensation of dreariness which pages of description could not convey. Furthermore, Mill quoted in full the second part of 'The May Queen,' termed 'New Year's Eve,' as a specimen of simple genuine pathos arising out of situations and feelings common to all mankind, and therefore fitted for a more extensive popularity than any other poem in the two volumes. But the reviewer's own favorite was 'The Lady of Shalott.' With the exception of its last stanza which, as it appeared in its original form, he disliked, he gave this piece in full. He asserted that it must be ranked among the very first of its class in the combination of the powers of narration and of scene-painting. Though he deemed its versification less exquisite, he placed the poem in other respects by the side of 'The Ancient Mariner' and 'Christabel.'

Mill's criticism was as much a review of the volume of 1830 as of that of 1832. Of the poems contained in the former he spoke with commendation of the 'Recollections of the Arabian Nights,' 'The Dying Swan,' 'The Kraken,' 'The Sleeping Beauty,' and of the two poems beginning "In the gloomy light" and "A spirit haunts the year's last hours." These last in his opinion were improperly called songs. The pieces in the second volume which he specifically praised—frequently with more or less of quotation—were 'Isabel,' 'Eleanore,' 'The Sisters,' 'Œnone,' 'The Palace of Art,' and 'The Lotos-Eaters.' With the mention of all these he declared that he had by no means exhausted the variety of beauty to be found in the two volumes. But Mill, though he pointed out

the qualities in which in his opinion Tennyson excelled, was not in the least blind to what he deemed his defects. Accordingly it may be worth while to specify what a man of so much intellectual power found to censure as well as to praise in poems upon the exact value of which the consensus of the generation had not even begun to settle. Mill looked upon 'Claribel,' the verses headed 'Elegiacs,' and 'A Dirge' as comparative failures. Worse failures than these were 'The Merman' and 'The Mermaid.' In them the poet was actually puerile. Upon the patriotic productions, as we may call them, he was especially severe. Of two pieces in particular, the 'English Warsong' and the 'National Song,' he was of the opinion that "unless they are meant for bitter ridicule of vulgar nationality, and of the poverty of intellect which usually accompanies it, their appearance here is unaccountable." The same remark was made about the sonnet on Bonaparte. If not so childish in manner, it had still something of the same spirit which characterized the preceding two just mentioned—that is, if these were to be taken as serious.

Certain too of the small poems Mill regarded as without meaning; or at least, if the author had a meaning, he had not been able to express it. The ones he specified as liable to this censure were the two songs to the 'Owl,' the verses entitled 'The How and the Why,' and a little poem of eight lines beginning with the words "Who can say." This Mill entitled 'Today and Yesterday.' These and two others are the only ones in the second volume which he cared to have

omitted, though there were two more which he looked upon as unsatisfactory, though not positive failures. These two were the poem beginning "All good things have not kept aloof," and the one entitled 'Hesperides,' notwithstanding what he conceded to be its fine opening. The two to be positively rejected were the lines on Christopher North and the stanzas of 'O Darling Room' which he characterized as a "little piece of childishness."

In nothing did Mill show the superiority of his estimate of the poetry that Tennyson had up to that time produced over the silly criticism which had then current vogue, than in his treatment of the volume of 1832 as compared with that of 1830. He spoke with the contempt it deserved of the common assertion that the late volume had fallen off from the poetic power displayed in the earlier. The superiority of the second venture he emphatically proclaimed. There were but few pieces in it to which he took exception. More than that he did not fail to make emphatic that not only had there been no falling off but how almost immeasurable had been the advance which Tennyson had made during the nearly thirty months that had elapsed between the publication of the two volumes. This we all see now; then it had been hid from the majority of professional critics, and continued to be hid for many years later. The first volume, he said, gave evidence of powers such as had not for many years been displayed by any new aspirant to the character of poet. In the second, while the faults of its predecessor were still visible, they were evidently

on the point of disappearing. The positive excellences of the poet were not only greater and more uniformly sustained, but they were of a distinctly higher order. His imagination and his reason had alike advanced. Mill did not predict positively his future; but he clearly indicated, that if the poet corrected the few faults he still possessed, a high place in English literature would be securely his.

Mill's article was the first public manifestation of the reaction against the estimate of Tennyson which had been generally current in periodical literature after the publication of the volume of 1832. But it is full as noticeable for the review of Tennyson's reviewer—though his name was not mentioned—as for his criticism of the poet. The different character of the two notices which the volumes had received, the one in 'Blackwood's Magazine' and the other in the 'Quarterly,' had, as we have seen, more than once attracted attention. Mill in turn discussed these articles. To the one in the monthly he did exact justice. That it displayed the usual levity and flippancy of that periodical he conceded. But it also evinced one of its better characteristics, a genuine appreciation and willing recognition of genius. The praise or blame in it, though shovelled out rather than measured, was on the whole fairly discriminating. Accordingly in his opinion, Tennyson's lines to Christopher North merely expressed in a commonplace way the author's resentment against a critique which merited from him no resentment, but rather, all things considered, a directly contrary feeling. On the

other hand, Mill had hardly language sufficiently contemptuous to express his opinion of the article in 'The Quarterly Review.' The method its writer had followed he declared to be the abundantly hackneyed one of selecting the few bad passages in the volume—not amounting to three pages in all—and such others as, by being separated from the context, might be made to appear ridiculous. These were then held up as specimens of the whole work. Not only was the method bad, but in his opinion the execution was worse. The criticism was in a strain of dull irony, the point of which consisted in its ill nature. Mill's treatment of the reviewer cannot itself be deemed a triumph of amiability. He styled him in one place "the small critic of the Quarterly," in another "the egregious critic," and the second epithet conveys not even so complimentary a sense as the first. He cites some of his remarks to comment on their imbecility. His general impression of 'The Quarterly Review' itself may be summed up in his assertion that the periodical in question, both under its original and under its present management, never recognized any new claim upon its admiration unless it was recommended by party interest or was forced upon it by the public voice.

During the years which followed his father's death till the time of his own marriage, Tennyson's regular home was with the family. As it continued to remain at Somersby until 1837, that was naturally his residence during this particular period. From the place itself, however, he constantly made excursions of

greater or less length. Their frequency and extent indeed depended largely upon the contents of his pocket-book; but we hear of him at times in various parts of Great Britain. It was on one of these excursions that his previously slight acquaintance with FitzGerald ripened into friendship. FitzGerald was born the same year as he. He entered Cambridge University in 1826 and was graduated in 1830. But though during two years of this time he was a member of the same college as Tennyson, they seem never to have met until some little time after they had both left the institution. This too in spite of the fact that FitzGerald himself was intimate with two or three persons who were special friends of the poet. One of these was Spedding. It was while on a visit to him at his father's residence, Mirehouse on Bassenthwaite Lake, that Tennyson and he became intimate. The acquaintance indeed was without doubt largely helped on by the weather; for during the three weeks of their stay, that was simply abominable. Rain prevailed constantly. This naturally threw them much of the time upon each other for entertainment.

Spedding's father was what is called a practical man, and he manifestly had no great admiration for the two unpractical visitors who were special friends of his son, particularly for the poetical one. He was, however, very courteous to his guests. All he asked for himself was to be let alone; and interested as he was in the care of his farm, and absent much of the day from the house, it was an easy matter to comply with his wishes in this particular. A man evidently

of a high type of character, he was from the purely literary point of view a fair representative of the hard-headed, middle-class Philistine. So far as poets were concerned, the best he could do was to regard them as specimens of a mild type of lunatic. In that region Coleridge and Shelley had resided for a longer or shorter time. The older Spedding had seen too much of them and other verse-makers to think very highly of them or their trade. He naturally could not see much sense in the interest manifested by his son in such trifles as lines about the death of Arthur and about the Lord of Burleigh and other pieces which were later to make up part of the volumes of 1842. FitzGerald indeed heard read during this visit 'The Day Dream,' 'Dora,' and 'The Gardener's Daughter.' Polite as Spedding's father was, it was probably with no great grief that he saw his two visitors take their departure in company with his son, at the end of May.

The three repaired to Ambleside on Lake Windermere where two of them stayed a week. But though Wordsworth's home was in the immediate neighborhood, Tennyson could not be induced to visit him in spite of Spedding's urgency. For that his invincible shyness stood in the way. His refusal he must have remembered with gratification in later years when visitors from all parts of the globe were knocking in season and out of season at his own doors. Tennyson, however, did come in contact with Hartley Coleridge who took to him mightily, and after the fourth "bottom" of gin thanked the Lord for having brought them together. But he manifestly did not make any

such favorable impression upon some of those he had left behind. If while he was at Mirehouse the sun, as Spedding tells us, did not display itself to advantage, neither apparently did Tennyson. According to his friend and host he was "very gruff and unmanageable."[1] The contrast between the quietness and optimism of FitzGerald and the discontent with everything of his companion struck Spedding sharply. After the departure of his guests he wrote to Donne an account of the visit. Tennyson, he said, "stayed three weeks, or it may be a month, but the sun did not shine to advantage, and it must be a very capable and effective sun that shall make his soul rejoice and say, 'Ha! Ha! I am warm.'"[2] There was, however, a good deal to account for the depression under which Tennyson with his peculiar temperament then labored. During the whole of these ten years of silence the future must have looked to him far from bright. High appreciation there was for him in certain quarters; but in general depreciation. It manifestly never occurred to him that this condition of things was due to his own neglect to publish the pieces which had excited the enthusiastic admiration of his comrades.

It is another proof of the influence which Tennyson exerted over all with whom he came in contact during the early days before his genius was universally recognized that the same profound impression of his superiority which he had previously made upon the men of the Cambridge circle who surrounded him, he

1 Hallam Tennyson's 'Tennyson and his Friends,' p. 403.
2 F. M. Brookfield's 'The Cambridge Apostles,' p. 267.

made also upon FitzGerald. The latter recognized his new friend's oddities and eccentricities; he was amused by them. The poet was always subject to fits of despondency; but it was during the years immediately following the death of Hallam that the burden of life seems to have weighed with peculiar heaviness upon his spirit. The feelings to which this gave rise did not affect, however, FitzGerald's estimate of the man. "I will say no more of Tennyson," he wrote to a friend, "than that the more I have seen of him, the more cause I have to think him great. His little humours and grumpinesses were so droll, that I was always laughing: and was often put in mind (strange to say) of my little unknown friend, Undine—I must however say, further, that I felt what Charles Lamb describes, a sense of depression at times from the overshadowing of a so much more lofty intellect than my own: this (though it may seem vain to say so) I never experienced before, though I have often been with much greater intellects: but I could not be mistaken in the universality of his mind; and perhaps I have received some benefit in the now more distinct consciousness of my dwarfishness."[1]

[1] Letter to John Allen of May 23, 1835, in his Letters edited by W. A. Wright, Vol. I, p. 28.

CHAPTER XIV

THE TEN YEARS' SILENCE—SECOND HALF
1837-1842

In April, 1835, Browning went to Moxon with his poem of 'Paracelsus.' Him he sought on account of his good name and fame with authors. That publisher had himself brought out a volume of verse. Consequently all poets with reputations to make either went to him of their own accord or were recommended to go by personal friends or by rival publishers. Naturally he had begun to grow weary of dealing in wares which so far from bringing in profit were attended with actual loss. Browning presented himself with a letter of introduction. No sooner was the letter read, Browning tells us, "than the Moxonian visage lowered exceedingly thereat—the Moxonian accent grew dolorous thereupon." 'Artevelde,' he assured him, had not paid expenses by thirty-odd pounds. "Tennyson's poetry is *popular at Cambridge,*" he continued. His further remark, however, gave the impression that Cambridge was the only place where it was popular. "Of 800," he said, "which were printed of his last, some 300 only have gone off."[1] Under the influence of these and other depressing facts, Moxon assured his visitor that it was doubtful if he would ever again

[1] Mrs. Orr's 'Life and Letters of Robert Browning,' Vol. I, p. 98.

venture into a transaction so unprofitable as the publication of poetry. There was no money in it at all. Accordingly he begged to decline even the inspection of Browning's manuscript.

Lapse of time did not cause even the leading publisher of the poetry of the period to change his opinion. The indifference of the public to the highest form of literature continued for many years. As late as 1844 the future Mrs. Browning wrote to a friend that in the eyes of all those who brought out books, dealing in poetry was nothing but a desperate speculation. A writer must have tried his public before he tries the publisher—that is, before he expects that individual, as a business man, to run any risk for him. This, too, was said after the success of the Tennyson volumes of 1842 had been assured. Accordingly we can get some conception of what must have been Moxon's feelings in 1835. About two years and a third had gone by since the poems of 1832 had appeared, and only three hundred copies had been sold. No one in the book trade could afford to bring out the epics of Homer or the plays of Shakespeare with such returns on the investment. To the publisher it meant pecuniary loss; to the author it was a petty number upon which to base any claim to reputation. There is no question indeed that during the whole period from 1830 to 1842—especially the earlier half of it—Tennyson was read by a comparatively small number and appreciated by a still smaller. Many seem to have been unaware of even the fact of his existence. To the student of contemporary critical literature during this period

there is nothing more noticeable than the little knowledge exhibited of him, the little interest taken in him outside of a limited circle. Men whose very names the world has now been quite content to forget were made subjects of serious consideration and in some instances of fulsome eulogy in periodicals which then stood highest in public estimation. Yet in these organs of public opinion Tennyson's name was then mentioned but seldom; in some of them it was not mentioned at all.

Two illustrations of his obscurity may be given, out of several which exist. During the fourth decade of the century the newly founded 'Fraser's Magazine' gave at intervals an account of the men of letters who were more or less in the public eye. Engravings of them accompanied the page of text describing them. The two together constituted what was called a 'Gallery of Literary Portraits.' Naturally the most noted men of the time—such as Rogers, Moore, Scott, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Carlyle, and Campbell—found there a place. But necessarily men of a much lower grade of distinction were included. There was, furthermore, no particular partiality displayed in the selection made. If the magazine took in its special friends like Jerdan and Lockhart, it did not fail to extend its notice to some of its pet aversions. Notoriety seems to have been the main reason for mentioning certain authors. With its usual horse-play it even introduced persons who had no claim whatever to be mentioned at all. In the list is no small number of persons of whom the world knew little then and no

longer remembers. But among the more than seventy men and women of whom it gave an account, laudatory or disparaging, the name of Tennyson does not occur.

This state of ignorance continued indeed up to the eve of the appearance of the edition of 1842. How little Tennyson was known even then, one fact of no particular significance in itself shows clearly. In January of the year just mentioned, a volume of selections from poets of prominence or assumed prominence came out. It was entitled 'Modern Poets of the Nineteenth Century.' In all forty-three names were represented. How wide-embracing and not over-particular was the drag-net may be inferred from the fact that the collection began with Gifford, whose verse was poorer, if possible, than his critical judgment. It ended with a selection from the writings of the unfortunate Lady Flora Hastings. But the collection strove to include specimens from the productions of all the poets of the period, the humblest as well as the highest, who had any claim whatever to recognition. It is significant of the gradual growing appreciation of the greatness of Keats that some of his work is given. But the name of Tennyson is absent just as he was about to take his place at the head of contemporary English poets.

Yet in spite of the comparatively little sale of his poems and the little recognition he received, the repute in which Tennyson was held was increasing all these years very steadily, even if very slowly. Besides the intrinsic value of a writer's own work, the influences that operate upon his reputation, either to enhance it

or to impair it, are usually too complex and manifold to justify labelling any particular one of them as a determining factor in bringing about the result. Still, great weight in extending Tennyson's fame must be accorded to the unhesitating belief in him and unhesitating support of him which came from his early associates at Cambridge University. The brilliant band which had there surrounded him, which had from the first admired him, which had hailed him as the coming poet when he had not yet attained his majority, never lost their faith in him during all these years of comparative neglect. The failure of his works to sell did not abate in the slightest their admiration and enthusiasm. Critical weighing in the scales they heeded not; critical disparagement inspired in them no other feeling than contempt. They were confident that the public would adopt their opinions, if once they could be permitted to share their knowledge. In season and out of season they unhesitatingly proclaimed his greatness as a poet to the dwellers in a world most of whom were unconscious of his existence, and many of those who knew of it were disposed to be unbelievers and scoffers.

Furthermore, the persons who made up this company of admirers comprised some of the choicest spirits of the age. Naturally they were themselves coming more and more to the front. In the effect wrought upon public opinion it is quality that counts more than numbers. Hence, as time went on, the estimate taken by these partisans of the poet could not be arrogantly set aside by the most pretentious of reviewers. The

influence of the Cambridge men in particular extended to their successors at the university. They kept up in that institution the belief which they themselves had held. The exhibition of the loyalty to the poet there manifested had from the beginning irritated at times the professional critics to a point almost beyond endurance. There appears to have been a discussion in some Cambridge society, possibly the Union, on the question whether Tennyson was or was not a great poet. This took place, it must be kept in mind, before most of the productions were published by which he is now widely known. The report of this debate, as we shall see later, made Christopher North almost foam at the mouth.

There was, however, a justification unknown to the general public for this attitude on the part of his admirers. To many of his old associates, if not to most of them, productions which were never to see the light till much later, were then shown. When at Cambridge his intimate friends had had the habit of taking his latest work and copying it out. The practice continued during the whole of the fourth decade. During this period these productions passed from hand to hand among the chosen few. The criticism to which Tennyson had been subjected stood in the way of any willingness on his part to publish what he had composed; but it did not prevent his composing. That went on uninterruptedly. Unhappily it went on too often without the agency of pen and ink. Tennyson composed a good deal without taking the pains to write it down. He kept it in his memory. It is a habit which

he seems to have maintained during much if not all of his life. The result of this dislike to the labor of writing was that he lost the recollection of many things in consequence of his delay in putting them on paper. Once he composed three hundred lines concerning Lancelot and his quest for the Sangreal. These he kept for some time in mind; but he neglected to keep them anywhere else. The result was that they all slipped from his memory before they came to be written down.[1]

Fortunately for him and for us, he frequently deviated from this practice. The poems which we know to have been written and to be passing from hand to hand in manuscript among his personal friends during the ten years' silence, make up no inconsiderable share of the second volume of the edition of 1842, and ought to have been published long before. Furthermore, several of the pieces which were subsequently to form a part of 'In Memoriam' had already been written during this early period. The sight of such productions not merely kept alive but increased the reputation of the poet in the circle of his private friends. Necessarily it could not and did not affect the opinion of the ignorant public. It was consequently inevitable that this belief in his greatness should not cause any perceptible addition to the sale of his writings. Neither the volume of 1830 nor that of 1832 ever went into a second edition. But as his early friends became themselves more conspicuous, the influence they wielded in his behalf became more

1 'The Journals of Walter White,' p. 151.

and more perceptible. In truth, it is manifest that in spite of the comparatively little circulation of his works he was assuming more and more a distinct position in the literature of his time. He was coming to have a body of recognized admirers distinct from his university associates.

This fact began at last to dawn upon the minds of critics. Mill's remark in his review that Tennyson's poems were winning their way by slow approaches to a reputation the limits of which it would be just then hazardous to predict, is one of a number of observations that show that the estimation in which he was held was gradually impressing itself upon the minds of men generally. Accordingly as time went on, though he was still under the shadow of earlier depreciation, there was manifested more and more of a disposition to treat him with respect. Even persons most disposed to dislike rarely ventured to condemn unqualifiedly. He was usually classed, to be sure, even by those favorably inclined, with Sterling, Trench, and Alford of his own Cambridge set; or with such respectable veterans as Leigh Hunt or Barry Cornwall; or even with such wearisome nonentities as David Macbeth Moir, who had grown up and flourished under the shelter of 'Blackwood's Magazine.' Of his immeasurable superiority to each one of these or to all of them combined there was hardly a suspicion entertained by the critics of the day. To maintain that he occupied a really lofty position, that he gave promise of occupying a much loftier one, would have struck almost every one of even the most well-disposed of

reviewers as a statement too extravagant to be admitted to the columns of any sanely conducted periodical. There were prominent critics whom an assertion of this sort would have filled with disgust. That he was a "true" poet was the most favorable view. That he was a great poet none of them ever imagined. Still, it is to be conceded that his general superiority to his Cambridge contemporaries was admitted, though with no decided conviction that this was the genuine gospel. From some it occasionally met with dissent, sometimes violently, sometimes mildly expressed.

This state of mind can be recognized in an incidental reference to Tennyson in 'The Edinburgh Review' for January, 1836. In it for the first time his name then appeared. During the fourth decade that periodical reviewed and sometimes reviewed favorably poets who are now known only to the literary antiquarian. It does not seem to have occurred to its editor that Tennyson was worth reviewing. In the number just specified was a criticism of Alford's 'The School of the Heart and Other Poems.' The article is noticeable for its grudging admission of the slowly growing prominence of Tennyson's position. The reviewer conceded that he was now the "most known of any of the young Cambridge poets who have lately taken wing." Still, it was implied, though not directly asserted, that impartial criticism was forced to point out his inferiority to Alford. This inferiority consisted in three things. Alford had the ability to choose his subjects from a higher class, to conceive them with

greater distinctness, and to express his thought with more precision. But there was something worse behind. This the reviewer attempted sadly but manfully to show. Tennyson, he said, "must not set it down to aridity and moroseness, if persons of riper years have regretted that his style was not sufficiently impregnated with thought;—that more mind was not apparent behind his words." The remarks of the reviewer were manifestly those of one worthy of consideration; for when it came to the display of lack of mind, his article was throughout the work of an expert.

The publication in 1836 of 'St. Agnes' in 'The Keepsake' for 1837, and of the 'Stanzas' in 'The Tribute' of the latter year, awakened intense enthusiasm in the admirers of the poet. Scant attention, however, comparatively speaking, was paid to them by the large majority of the most prominent critical journals of the day. In the few instances in which they were mentioned, there is nothing more noticeable than the cautious attitude assumed by the reviewer about committing himself to unqualified laudation. Yet it is evident that both of these poems made a profound impression upon many who had hitherto been indifferent or hostile to the poet. The critic of 'The Athenæum'[1] was so struck by the 'St. Agnes' that in his notice of the Annual in which it appeared he printed it entire. He felt it, however, incumbent upon him to apologize for his admiration. Though the paper was pressed for space, he wrote, "we must, however,

[1] 'Athenæum,' November 5, 1836, p. 783.

find room for a poem, by Mr. Alfred Tennyson, which, though it has much of the right convent spirit about it, is withal so perversely fantastic, that we extract it as much for its curiosity as its beauty." This criticism is extracted here not for its sense but for its curiosity. If there be any one epithet utterly inappropriate to the poem in question, it is that of fantastic. No more in Tennyson's 'St. Agnes' than in that of Keats's is there the least direct allusion to the particular tale of fiction which does duty for the life of St. Agnes. The poem of Keats culminates in the flight of the heroine with the man she loves. In Tennyson's poem no feelings of this nature fill the heart of the maiden. No thought of earthly love is there suggested. Instead is depicted the aspiration of a saintly spirit that longs to be the bride of heaven, her eagerness to pass from a world of sin and sorrow to the purity of the celestial life. At the very beginning of the poem the maiden is represented as looking forward from the chill confines of her convent home to the habitation on high to become fit for which is her sole desire. At the very end is represented the ecstatic vision of the purified soul freed from the incumbrance of the flesh, and about to form an eternal union with the heavenly bridegroom. How perfect is the portrayal of the thoughts and feelings of the white-robed vestal, in whom the spiritual life has eradicated all soil of sense, no one needs now to be told. The epithet of fantastic could be applied to the poem only by one who had no comprehension of its inner meaning.

There is more excuse for the attitude assumed by

the writer of the article on 'The Tribute' which appeared in 'The Edinburgh Review' for October, 1837. The poem of Tennyson contained in it, picturing as it does the hallucination of the lover who has lost his bride, does not reveal its meaning after hasty reading. This is usually all that the hard-pressed critic is able to give. But in this instance, though he could not fully understand, he could in a measure appreciate. The beauty of the lines impressed him. In his article occurs the second of the two mentions of Tennyson which are found in that stately periodical before the publication of the edition of 1842. The first had found him lacking in thought. The second was to find him mysterious and obscure. Still, on the strength of the 'Stanzas' appearing in 'The Tribute,' the reviewer had got so far along as to be able to recognize Tennyson as a "true" poet. In this notice of 'The Tribute' we are told that it contains "a great deal of pleasing poetry" without "exhibiting any one specimen of very marked genius or striking originality." There were quoted several of these "pleasing" pieces which are as little worth reading now as they were worth reading then. It ended, however, with citing a number of lines—fifty-eight in all—from the one poem which gives all the value it now possesses to the volume containing it. "We do not profess perfectly to understand," said the reviewer, "the somewhat mysterious contribution of Mr. Alfred Tennyson, entitled 'Stanzas'; but amidst some quaintness, and some occasional absurdities of expression, it is not

difficult to detect the hand of a true poet.'"[1] The occasional absurdities the critic unfortunately kept to himself; no one since has been able to discover them.

But perhaps the most significant testimony to the growth of Tennyson's reputation is the fact that in the latter part of this fourth decade he was beginning to have imitators. Most of the productions of this nature have disappeared from the memory of all men if they ever fixed themselves at all upon the minds of any. The existence of some of these asserted imitations was doubtless due to the fancy of the critic. Of this there is one noticeable instance. In the middle of 1836, the editorship of 'The Monthly Repository'—which there has been more than one occasion to mention—passed from Fox to Richard Hengist Horne. After holding it for a year, he was succeeded in the position by Leigh Hunt. Under him the periodical maintained for some months a lingering life but at last gave up the ghost. To the first number that came out under his charge—that for July, 1837—he contributed a poem called 'Blue-Stocking Revels, or the Feast of the Violets.' In the second of its three cantos, entitled 'The Presentation Ball,' came an account in alphabetical order of all the female writers of the day. In it the future Mrs. Browning was described in the following words:

> A young lady then, whom to miss were a *caret*
> In any verse-history, named, I think, Barrett,
> (I took her at first for a sister of Tennyson)
> Knelt, and received the god's kindliest benison.

[1] Vol. LXVI, p. 103.

"Truly," said he, "dost thou share the blest power
Poetic, the fragrance as well as the flower,
The gift of conveying impressions unseen,
And making the vaguest thoughts know what they mean.
Only pray have a care, nor let Alfred beguile
Admiration too far into manner and style;
Nor divide with the printer your claims to be read,
By directing our faculties when to say *èd.*
Such anxieties do both your geniuses wrong;
Tend to make things too verbal, the mind not so strong;
And besides, my dear, who has not read an old song."

The matter of the whole poem is poor; the expression of it is worse; the asserted charge of imitation is worst. Miss Barrett naturally felt surprise and annoyance, and would have been justified in expressing resentment. Yet this same ridiculous charge of imitating Tennyson had been made before and continued to be made afterward. Some time after, she gave vent to her feelings of vexation at this utterly baseless charge in an undated letter, but pretty certainly belonging to 1842 or 1843. "As to Tennyson," she wrote, "his admirer I am, and his imitator I am *not* as certainly. Nearly everything in 'The Seraphim' was written before I ever read *one* of his then published volumes; and even the 'instructing the reader to say *ed*' was done on the pattern of Campbell's 'Theodoric,' and not from a later example."[1]

Peculiar critical obtuseness it required to charge Miss Barrett with being an imitator of Tennyson. Still, in that early period when the poet himself had

[1] 'Contemporary Review,' Vol. XXIII, p. 454.

but little public recognition, there are testimonies sufficient to show that in the eyes of the men of the time a school of writers were consciously or unconsciously forming themselves upon him and adopting his manner and method. That surely was the opinion of critics. We may throw aside the testimony found in a review of the poems of John Clare which appeared in 'Blackwood's Magazine' for August, 1835. In it mention is made of "the inferior followers of Shelley, Keates, Hunt, and Tennysson." The remark carries little weight because it is manifest that the writer of the article was not too well acquainted with the better-known men of whom he was talking. There is far stronger evidence of the existence of a condition of things still little recognized by even well-read students of the poet and of the period. In October, 1838, Henry Taylor was engaged in correspondence with a young Oxford student who had consulted him about his career. The latter, in seeking for advice, had sent him some verses of his own composition. These Taylor of course told him had been read with much pleasure. That is something which the sender of verses is always told, if told anything at all. In this instance the assertion appears to have been sincere. "I should like to know something," wrote Taylor, "of your English poetical reading, whether it lies amongst the poets of the seventeenth century, or amongst the moderns, whether with those *Musas severiores qui colunt,* or with the lighter authors. Your 'Poet's Dirge' seems to savour a little of such reading as Fletcher's 'Faithful Shepherdess' in the

better time of English poetry, or perhaps of Tennyson in the present day."

This is one of several indications that Tennyson's influence was not only beginning to be felt but also to be recognized. Far more marked is the involuntary tribute paid about this time to the slowly increasing appreciation of his poetry in an incidental reference to him by his ancient detractor, 'The Quarterly Review.' It is found in the number for June, 1839. It occurs in a criticism of the volume entitled 'Poems of Many Years,' by Richard Monckton Milnes. This work had come out in 1838. Were internal evidence of much value, one would say that the review must have been the work of John Wilson Croker.[1] The sentiments expressed were certainly his sentiments. The attitude towards Milnes was partly favorable, partly unfavorable; but it inclined more to the former than to the latter. A good deal of hope was expressed for his future. His volume, with all its faults, contained in the critic's opinion better English verse than had yet been published by any living writer, not yet on the wrong side of the *mezzo del cammin.* The 'Edinburgh' had inferentially, as we have seen, placed Alford above Tennyson. The 'Quarterly' unhesitatingly placed Milnes higher.

But the critic in the course of his article pointed out one danger which beset the author. Milnes, he

[1] The assertion has several times been made that this review was the work of Kinglake. In 'The Cambridge Apostles' (p. 237), it is declared further that Milnes was aware of the fact. The article, however, bears no possible resemblance to Kinglake's style, and certainly conflicts with the opinions he expressed later.

asserted, was meant by nature to be a poet. If he ultimately failed to secure the station to which he was entitled, he would have nothing to blame but his perverse admiration for absurd models. One is naturally curious to know who these absurd models were that had harmfully kindled mistaken admiration. In another part of his article the critic gives us to understand who at least two of them were. "We are quite sure," he wrote, "that he [Milnes] will hereafter obey one good precept in an otherwise doubtful decalogue—

'Thou shalt believe in Milton, Dryden, Pope;'

and regret few sins of his youth more bitterly than the homage he has now rendered at the fantastic shrines of such baby idols as Mr. John Keats and Mr. Alfred Tennyson." In this disparaging opinion the 'Quarterly' was joined at this very time by the 'Edinburgh.' In a review of the poetical works of Shelley which appeared in the latter periodical in July, 1839,[1] there occurs a reference to "the unbearable coxcombry of the 'intense' and mystic school of versifiers who made him their model—including both the Shellites of the old connexion, and those of the new, or Tennysonites." In these two extracts we find expressed the dying throes of a criticism, which after vaunting itself exceedingly for a decade, hardly ventured a few years later to put forth its face; or if it did, was either contemptuously spurned or was too much despised to be even noticed.

[1] Vol. LXIX, p. 510.

To go back to the private life of Tennyson during the second half of this ten years' period of silence. After their departure from Somersby in 1837, the family took up their residence at High Beech in Epping Forest. There for about three years they remained. As might be inferred from the name, the place was one of the highest points in the Forest. It was covered with magnificent beech trees and is also in close proximity to Waltham Abbey, whose bells are said to have inspired the Christmas canticle of 'In Memoriam.' The nearness of the new home to London enabled Tennyson to come into frequent contact with his old associates. It was the evening journey between his residence and the city which suggested to him the couplet of 'Locksley Hall':

> And at night along the dusky highway near and nearer drawn,
> Sees in heaven the light of London flaring like a dreary dawn.

He was naturally a frequent visitor to his intimate friend and unwavering admirer Spedding at his law-chambers in Lincoln's Inn. He became one of the members of the club meeting on Tuesday, established in 1838, which speedily took the name of its founder Sterling. There he inevitably saw many of his old friends and fellow students; for fully half of the original members had belonged to the Cambridge Apostles. It was for him in all probability a nominal membership rather than an active one. For much

participation in the debates his shyness would stand in the way.

In 1840 the family removed to Tunbridge Wells in Kent. Thither they had been ordered by a London physician, who said it was the only place in England for persons with their constitutions. It turned out an unfortunate choice. The house chosen was too small for comfort. The place itself was in Tennyson's eyes an abomination. According to his statement, it was not long before they were half-killed by the tenuity of the atmosphere and the presence of steel more or less in earth, air, and water. There is nothing peculiar in this particular belief. Most of us are disposed to find detrimental to health the air of any place where we do not care to dwell. With these feelings about Tunbridge, whether well founded or more likely purely imaginary, it was naturally not a spot where they cared to remain permanently. In the autumn of 1841, the family removed to Boxley near Maidstone. One main reason for the choice of this new abode was its proximity to Park House, the home of the Lushingtons, one of whom married the following year a sister of the poet. In all these changes of residence while Tennyson remained regularly with the family, he made frequent excursions over the country, though doubtless far fewer than he desired. Through all his early career there are references in the correspondence of the period to his changing plans, to his scheme of going somewhere, he hardly knew where, and ending up with going nowhere, like many of us who start out with the idea of visiting the ends of the earth but

consider ourselves at last fortunate if we can succeed in getting into the nearest country and sometimes into the next county.

More than once Tennyson is represented as planning a trip to some place of importance and finally landing in some place which no one had ever heard of, or if heard of, had never cared to see. The failure of many of these projected trips was in all probability due not so much to change of intention as to lack of means. In an undated letter belonging somewhere in this period, Spedding referred to the uncertain movements of his friend. "Alfred Tennyson," he wrote, "has reappeared, and is going to-day or to-morrow to Florence, or to Killarney, or to Madeira, or to some place where some ship is going—he does not know where. He has been on a visit to a madhouse (not as a patient), and has been delighted with the mad people, whom he reports as the most agreeable and the most reasonable persons he has met with. The keeper is Dr. Allen . . . with whom he has been greatly taken." If this be the Dr. Allen who subsequently induced him to engage in a speculative enterprise, he had ample reason to regret his visit to the madhouse, in the pecuniary trouble and mental distress which beset him in the early forties.

It must not, however, be fancied that aimless wandering characterized at any time the life of Tennyson. He was in truth one of the hardest of students, and systematically devoted himself to the acquisition of knowledge in many different fields. Several of these might be considered as lying outside the peculiar

province of a poet. He not merely learned modern languages and made himself familiar with their literatures, but he devoted time and attention to the study of the natural sciences. To botany, geology, and astronomy he paid special attention both then and in later life. But as is to be expected, while we hear of his journeys or intended journeys in the correspondence of the period, little reference is made to the studies he was pursuing while at home, whether it was at Somersby or High Beech, or at Boxley, where the family remained for a while before their removal to Cheltenham. It was while residing at Boxley that Tennyson broke finally the silence of years by once more appearing in print. As the publication of the poems of 1842 marks the turning-point in his career, it demands fulness of consideration of the circumstances attending its production as well as of the nature of its reception by the public. It demands it all the more because erroneous statements have been made and still continue to be occasionally made upon both these points.

CHAPTER XV

THE POEMS OF 1842

As the fifth decade of the century opened, the intimate personal friends of Tennyson had become somewhat impatient to have him appear once more in print. Their faith in him, fed as it was by the perusal of unpublished poems, had steadily waxed more intense. Those permitted to read these productions deplored his continued silence. Outside too of his associates there were plenty of men ready to encourage him who stood far higher in ability than any single one of his detractors. Walter Savage Landor heard read from manuscript in December, 1837, the poem of 'The Passing of Arthur,' which when published appeared under the title of 'Morte d'Arthur.' In a letter of that year he said of it that "it is more Homeric than any poem of our time, and rivals some of the noblest parts of the Odyssea."[1]

But no suggestions, no entreaties of any sort could induce Tennyson to publish. At the bottom of this decision was mainly his excessive sensitiveness to criticism and the rough treatment to which his previous volume had been subjected. In addition to this he shared in the general belief that the times were

[1] John Forster's 'Walter Savage Landor,' 1869, p. 509.

unpropitious to the publication of poetry. There was no sale for it, at least for that kind of it which was of a high grade. There was accordingly little inducement for the author to submit himself to the tender mercies of a public which did not care to read what he wrote, or if by any chance it did read, was inclined to judge it harshly. There was nothing peculiar to Tennyson himself in this state of mind beyond the intensity of the feeling with which he held it. All the writers of that period shared in it more or less. Milnes, for example, wrote in March, 1837, to Aubrey de Vere of the hesitation he felt about publishing his poems. He was not at all disposed to bring them out till he had made them as perfect as lay in his power. "I am too old," he said, "to produce them as youthful exercises, so that they will have to come forward on their own merits without excuse or veil; hence the assiduous correction of them by judgment and experience is imperative; and when the world is such that Alfred Tennyson does not think it worth while to write down his compositions, there need be no rash eagerness on my part."[1] In a later letter to the same friend he referred again to this characteristic of the poet. "Tennyson," he wrote, "composes every day, but nothing will persuade him to print, or even write it down."[2]

The pressure upon him to publish became more insistent after the appearance of the two poems which came out in 'The Keepsake' and 'The Tribute.' "Do

1 'Life and Letters of Richard Monckton Milnes,' Vol. I, p. 194.
2 *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 220.

you ever see Tennyson,'' wrote Trench to Milnes in March, 1838, ''and if so, could you not urge him to take the field? I think with the exception of myself and him, everybody sent to 'The Tribute' the poorest, or nearly the poorest, things they had by them. But I suppose that as it was only for a charity, it did not much signify. His poem was magnificent.''[1] These observations could hardly have been altogether gratifying to Trench's correspondent, who had himself been largely instrumental in procuring pieces for the collection. In it, too, four of his own had appeared. Still the correctness of the criticism no one is now likely to question. But the urgent appeal of Trench, if it ever reached Tennyson, had no effect upon his resolution. Feeble as we now know were the real reasons for his silence, there was in his own mind what would appear a plausible justification for his course. He was well aware that he was little regarded outside of a comparatively small circle. Though this circle had been steadily enlarging, nevertheless it still remained small. Most of the men of the English-speaking world had never heard of him; most of those who had heard, had been content to accept the contemptuous estimate expressed of him years before by 'The Quarterly Review.' His two published pieces, so warmly admired by those who read them, were read after all by a far from large number. For men generally they were largely lost to sight in the jungle of poetical weeds by which they were surrounded. Nor even in the circle of his immediate friends had the

[1] R. M. Milnes's 'Life and Letters,' Vol. I, p. 208.

first of these two contributions met always with warm recognition. The poem of 'St. Agnes,' Sterling was not disposed to admire. "I had heard much more of it," he wrote to Trench, "than I think it deserves. The great merit, as usual with him, is his eye for the picturesque. An iced saint is certainly much better than an iced cream, but not much better than a frosted tree. The original Agnes is worth twenty of her."[1] It is clear from this very shallow comment, in which a comparison is made between Tennyson's poem and the totally dissimilar one of Keats, that Sterling had no comprehension of the piece or of what it was intended to illustrate. His remarks are only of importance because they show that his attention had been called to it by the impression which it had made upon others and by the admiration which it had excited.

It was not unnatural therefore that Tennyson should remain unconvinced of the desirability of publication. However much personal friends might exalt him, he was well aware that he was really but little known. There was clearly no eagerness on the part of the general public to read what he had already published. What evidence was there that they would welcome what he might further choose to publish? During the years which had gone by since his two ventures, there was not sufficient demand for his poetry—at least the demand was not urgent enough—to render it advisable to bring out a second edition of either volume. In this respect his fortunes may be said to resemble those of Keats. What was true of his poetic predecessor

[1] R. C. Trench's 'Letters and Memorials,' Vol. I, p. 220.

was to some extent true of himself. It is right to add also that the admirers of the one were largely the admirers of the other. Indeed the resemblance of the two men in their fortunes was indicated in a letter written in September, 1841, by the same John Sterling who had been dissatisfied with the poem in 'The Keepsake.' "Lately," he wrote to Trench, "I have been reading again some of Alfred Tennyson's second volume, and with profound admiration of his truly lyric and idyllic genius. There seems to me to have been more epic power in Keats—that fiery, beautiful meteor. But they are two most true and great poets. When one thinks of the amount of recognition they have received, one may well bless God that poetry is in itself strength and joy, whether it be crowned by all mankind or left alone in its own magic hermitage."

These words might fairly be taken as justifying the resolution of Tennyson not to appear. They certainly convey the impression that the public as a whole was indifferent to the merits of both himself and of Keats, or rather ignorant of their existence. In truth the little sale of their works was later given as having had the effect of increasing their reputation. This extraordinary view was taken in a criticism of the volumes of 1842 which was as hostile as it dared to be. "Until only very recently," remarked 'The Literary Gazette,' "it was difficult to obtain either the poems by John Keats or Alfred Tennyson; and the scarcity of their works has been the means of adding greatly to the reputation of the authors; they have been more inquired after than read, and their names

better known than their poems.'"[1] The profound discovery that the inability to secure an author's works contributes to the spread of his fame could have come only from the editor of the journal in which the criticism appeared. It bears the stamp of Jerdan himself.

There is no doubt, however, that at the beginning of the fifth decade of the century, it was coming to be difficult to procure Tennyson's poems. The number of copies printed had not been large in the first instance. During the years which had passed this number had been well-nigh exhausted. Yet it is doubtful if the scarcity of the volumes, combined with the urgency of friends and admirers, would have been of avail to break the poet's policy of silence, had not another agency now come forward to force him to action. Pressure for publication showed itself from a quarter he could hardly have anticipated. The information was conveyed to him in 1841 that his poems were to be reprinted in America. That project was not entirely new. As far back as January, 1838, a highly appreciative notice of his writings had appeared at Boston in 'The Christian Examiner.' This was a quarterly review with then a good deal of reputation as the organ of the Unitarian body. The author of the article was John Sullivan Dwight, originally a clergyman, subsequently a member of the Brook Farm community, and later known as a musical critic of authority. It may have been in consequence of this review that a reprint in this country of Tennyson's two volumes came to be under consideration that

1 'Literary Gazette' for November 19, 1842, p. 788.

same year. Whether due to the disinclination of the publisher on second thought to risk the venture, or to the remonstrance of Tennyson himself, the undertaking, if seriously contemplated, was not carried out at that time. But in this instance it was evident from the communication sent that there was to be no faltering. The news was hardly agreeable. There was a pretty large number of his earlier pieces which Tennyson had no desire to have brought again to the attention of the public. The faults in many of them and the futility of some of them he had long before come to see more clearly than the most venomous of his critics. Naturally the prospect of their reappearance did not please him. But what could he do?

It is a proof of the steady advance which had been silently going on in Tennyson's reputation that transatlantic eyes had for some time begun to look upon his poems as fit subjects for reprint. Even in England the number of copies issued were showing themselves inadequate to meet the demand, slowly growing as it had been. Mrs. Browning tells us in a letter of September, 1842, that though she had the volume of 1832, she had been unable to procure that of 1830, having inquired for it vainly.[1] But if his poems were becoming scarce in England, it was practically impossible to procure them in America. His admirers in this country, whatever their number, were no longer disposed to rest content with copies of single pieces or with fragmentary extracts. Hence came from them this ominous reminder of what was in store for him,

[1] 'Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning,' Vol. I, p. 109.

if he neglected any longer to make a renewed appearance before the public. The pressure was of a kind against which he could make no effective resistance. The land of the free, as he complained, felt itself free to help itself to his writings, and to reprint them for him, if he were indisposed to take that course on his own responsibility. For it was distinctly, though delicately, intimated that if he himself took no action, action would be taken for him.

So much has been said and justly said against the book-pirate, and of the wrongs inflicted by him upon authors, that it is well to put on record the few services to literature which he has rendered. He occasionally took the place of posterity and did its work. The pressure he put upon the reluctant writer has been sometimes beneficial. It was certainly so in this instance. Tennyson might have held out against the entreaties of his friends. But against the menace of this new peril he was helpless to protect himself by inaction. "You bore me about my book," he wrote to FitzGerald some time in 1841; "so does a letter just received from America, threatening, tho' in the civilest terms, that, if I will not publish in England, they will do it for me in that land of freemen."[1] In contemplating the reproduction of much of his early verse with which he had come to be dissatisfied, he might well add as he did, "I may curse, knowing what they will bring forth. But I don't care." The action he was led to take showed however that he did care. Something had to be done in order to stop the trans-

[1] 'Memoir,' Vol. I, p. 178.

atlantic republication of his earlier volumes, some of which would doubtless triumph over the vigilance of the custom house and find their way into English hands. At this very time copies of Macaulay's essays, collected and printed in America, were stealing into Great Britain in such numbers as to force the reluctant author to bring them out early in 1843 in a revised form. So in this case what the urgency of friends could not accomplish, the pressure of the book-pirate did. The prospect roused Tennyson from his inaction. Groaning in spirit and doubtless with a good deal of inward imprecation and certainly of inward trepidation, he resolved to try his fortunes once more with the public.

It may be added that Lowell took some credit to himself for bringing about this result. The fact is made known to us in a letter of his to Duyckinck, then editor of the short-lived literary periodical entitled 'Arcturus.' It bears the date of December 5, 1841. In this letter, Lowell told his correspondent that Tennyson was to bring out "a new and correct edition of his poems." While he did not wish to state the authority for the assertion, he assured him that it could be relied upon, for it came from the author himself. "I have the great satisfaction," he continued, "of thinking that the publication is in some measure owing to myself, for it was by my means he was written to about it, and he says that 'his American friends' are the chief cause of his reprinting."[1] Accordingly an announcement appeared in the literary

[1] H. E. Scudder's 'James Russell Lowell,' Vol. I, pp. 96-97.

notices of 'Arcturus' for the following February to the effect that "it is understood that Moxon, the London publisher, is about to issue a new edition of the poems of Alfred Tennyson, undertaken by the author, we believe, at the solicitation of his *American* friends and readers." The word here italicized so appears in the periodical. The exact feelings of Tennyson towards his American friends may be guessed but need not be stated. Still, as it turned out, he had far more reason to rejoice in their interference than to regret it.

The decision to publish was unquestionably a surprise to most and probably to nearly all of his English admirers. When at last the news spread about in the latter part of 1841 that Tennyson was about "to take the field," as Trench expressed it, the statement was received by many with amazement that amounted almost to incredulity. In a postscript to a letter written in October of this same year by FitzGerald to Frederick Tennyson, he communicated to the poet's brother the astounding information. "Just heard from Edgeworth," he said, "that Alfred is in London 'busy preparing for the press'!!!" Three exclamation points, it was felt by the writer, were necessary to indicate adequately the wonder of it. On the part of the author himself we are certain that he took the action he did with few anticipations of success and with many misgivings as to failure. It is suggestive, however, of the extreme care that Tennyson invariably employed to perfect his work that in this instance, as in so many others, he resorted to the

precaution of printing a few copies of some of the poems for private examination before offering them to the public. A book of several hundred pages preceded the publication of the edition of 1842. It contained eight of his pieces in blank verse—'Morte d'Arthur,' 'Dora,' 'The Gardener's Daughter,' 'Audley Court,' 'Walking to the Mail,' 'St. Simeon Stylites,' 'Ulysses,' and 'Godiva.' It is hardly necessary to add that these were scattered through the second volume of the edition of 1842.

Now that we know the results of this venture we can observe with curiosity, if not with wonder, the anxiety about its success which beset both the author and his friends. The almost universal belief that there was no market for poetry of a high order is brought out constantly in the correspondence of the period. Equally appears at intervals Tennyson's peculiar sensitiveness to criticism and his dread of it. Early in 1842, while his work was in preparation for the press, he was a good deal dispirited by the departure from England of the one friend upon whom he had relied to come to his support from expected attack. This was Spedding, who had gone to America as secretary to Lord Ashburton, dispatched thither to negotiate the settlement of the northeastern boundary of the United States. Spedding, he knew, not only sympathized with him but believed in him fully. Naturally he was downhearted at an absence whose length could not be foretold. "Some fop," he wrote to his future brother-in-law, Lushington, "will get the

start of him in the *Ed. Review* where he promised to put an article, and I have had abuse enough.'"[1]

That Tennyson himself should have feared failure after his previous experience was not unnatural. But the same little anticipation of his acceptance by the world at large and consequently of the limited sale of his poetical works was exhibited by his warmest admirers. It continued too for some time after the volumes of 1842 had come out. It was very much in evidence while the business of getting them ready for publication was going on. No one was a fuller believer in the man and the poet than FitzGerald. He was indeed no blind worshipper. On the contrary he was wont to amuse himself with Spedding's uncompromising partisanship. Yet while confident in the ultimate success of the work, it is manifest that at the outset he had little expectation of its immediate popularity. "Alfred," he wrote to Frederick Tennyson in March, 1842, "is busy preparing a new volume for the press: full of doubts, troubles, &c. The reviewers will doubtless be at him: and with justice for many things: but some of the poems will outlive the reviewers.'"[2] This is so far from being a glowing, it is rather a gloomy prediction of immortality; but it manifestly expressed the feeling which prevailed then in the inner circle of the poet's friends. It cannot be said that it augured hopeful anticipations of success.

The printing of the work was at last completed. On May 14, 1842, London papers contained the follow-

1 'Memoir,' Vol. I, p. 180.
2 FitzGerald's 'Letters and Literary Remains,' Vol. I, p. 94.

ing advertisement: "Just Published. Tennyson's Poems in two volumes." This was the simple announcement of the venture, made without the slightest preliminary puffing or the slightest attempt of any sort to arrest the popular attention. It turned out in time that neither had been needed, though the appearance in 1842 of numerous poetical rivals might seem of itself to render the prospects of this particular work precarious. That year saw the publication of volumes of verse by veteran poets whose very names might fairly be expected to challenge the attention of the public. In March had come out Campbell's 'Pilgrim of Glencoe,' and in April Wordsworth's 'Poems of Early and Late Years,' including the drama of 'The Borderers.' Both of these, it is creditable to the sense of the public, had as little success as if their authors had been utterly unknown to fame. Early, too, in July, Leigh Hunt brought out 'The Palfrey, a Love-Story of Old Times.'

These were the work of the veterans. But this same year saw also the publication of poems by men of the younger generation who had already established greater or less claim to popular recognition. Bulwer diversified his production of novels by making one of his occasional ventures into poetry with the tale of 'Eva.' Henry Taylor, having recovered from the shock of the success of 'Philip Van Artevelde,' had come forward with his third play, the historical drama of 'Edwin the Fair.' Early in the year, Trench published a volume bearing the title of 'Poems from Eastern Sources: The Steadfast Prince, and other

Poems.' Towards its close he came out again with a volume entitled 'Genoveva.' Robert Browning in his series of 'Bells and Pomegranates' brought to the attention of a world now become unheedful, his drama of 'King Victor and King Charles,' and later, what was of far more importance, his 'Dramatic Lyrics.' Even our old friend, the now forgotten Robert Montgomery—who as regards the sale of his works had been far the most successful writer of verse of the fourth decade just so long as he continued to write it—turned momentarily aside from the equally successful business of preaching, and produced a ponderous poem entitled 'Luther.' This he besought Carlyle to review. Though Carlyle refused to criticise this "rhymed rigmarole," as he termed it—the rigmarole chanced to be in blank verse—the public did not refuse to buy. The work appeared late in February; early in May it went into a second edition, and a third came out in 1843, and a fourth in 1846. But the great success of the year was Macaulay's 'Lays of Ancient Rome.' The volume appeared in October. It at once gained a popularity which it has never since lost. Altogether 1842 was remarkable for its number of poetical ventures. In the general assault which was made then upon the attention of the public from so many sources of interest, the year is to us now mainly memorable for the production of the two volumes of Tennyson's poems.

Before describing the reception which these two volumes met, it is desirable to say something of their contents. The second was made up of matter hitherto

unprinted with the exception of the poem of 'St. Agnes,' and the three stanzas entitled 'The Sleeping Beauty,' which came now to serve as the nucleus about which was built up 'The Day Dream.' On the contrary, the first consisted mainly of pieces which had appeared in the previous volumes of 1830 and 1832. Of the fifty-six poems which were found in the former, the majority were discarded. In those which were retained very few alterations were made. Not so of the volume of 1832. Of thirty poems which there appeared, most of the important ones were selected to be included in the new edition. With the exception of the one entitled 'Hesperides' and two of the feminine portraits, 'Rosalind' and 'Kate,' those retained embrace all that were of any length without saying anything whatever as to their quality. But to this same first volume were added seven poems hitherto unprinted. They were entitled 'Lady Clara Vere de Vere,' 'The Blackbird,' the conclusion of 'The May Queen,' and the three pieces dealing with the development of English liberty, which bore respectively as their first lines: "You ask me, why, though ill at ease," "Of old sat Freedom on the heights," and "Love thou thy land, with love far-bought." Finally there was added the poem entitled 'The Goose.' It would have been no loss to the volume had this never appeared. With one exception the composition of the seven belonged to the year 1833.

It was the changes made in the selections taken from the 'Poems' of 1832 which constituted the most distinctive feature of this first volume. That changes

should be made by Tennyson was inevitable. As regards their methods of composition poets divide themselves into two broadly distinct classes. In the members of the first, the conceptions are struck out at a heat. They find at once adequate expression, or at all events such expression as the writer is either unable or indisposed to modify materially. They come forth perfect in his eyes or near enough perfection to prevent his bestowing upon them any further care. Now and then one word may eventually be substituted for another, now and then a line or a passage may be remodelled. But beyond this chance attention to details there is no serious effort put forth to alter the original form to any extent worth considering. To use an outworn comparison, Minerva has sprung full-panoplied from the head of Jove. It is consequently felt to be a work of supererogation to make any change in her armor. On the other hand, with poets of the second class the expression is built up elaborately. It is by slow degrees that the pile reaches the perfection aimed at. The glow that illuminates their pages is not due to lightning flashes of inspiration. It is the result of steady and prolonged blaze. Poets of this order are not necessarily either greater or lesser literary artists than those belonging to the other; but they are distinctly more conscious.

Nor is there justification for claiming superiority for the procedure employed by the poets of either one of these two classes. In the instance of each the method is followed by the writer which is for him the most suitable for embodying effectually in verse what

he seeks to say. Furthermore, while these classes have in general a broad line of demarcation, it does not follow that the division between them extends invariably to particulars. The writer of the one class occasionally invades the province of the other. Those of the first sometimes, though not often, employ, at least for short pieces or passages, the slowly elaborating processes of the second. More frequently the poets of this second class produce in a moment of inspiration some piece, in which so far as they are concerned, no further change is felt to be feasible or desirable. Furthermore there are poets who seem to belong sometimes to one of these classes and sometimes to the other. It is only a broad general division that is outlined here; it will never hold true of all its details.

Of this second class of writers whose poetic product is the result of elaborate workmanship, Tennyson is certainly a conspicuous representative. The fact was made very evident in the contents of this first volume of the 'Poems' of 1842. Some of the pieces retained from the volume of 1832 were indeed left unchanged. But alterations there were in others of them on the most extensive scale. This was particularly noticeable in Parts I and IV of 'The Lady of Shalott,' in 'Mariana in the South,' in 'The Miller's Daughter, in 'Œnone,' in 'The Palace of Art,' in 'The Dream of Fair Women,' and in the choric song of 'The Lotos-Eaters.' No student of Tennyson's writings needs to be told that these are the most important poems of the volume of 1832. The changes they individually underwent form

in consequence a curious study in the methods employed by the poet to perfect his work. Stanzas were omitted, stanzas were added. In certain instances the changes were so numerous and on so grand a scale that the sum of them amounted almost to recasting the whole poem or some particular part of it.

Great was the outcry that arose in consequence in many quarters. The desirability of any of these alterations was doubted by several even of the poet's warmest admirers. By some of them vehement protest was made. It was certainly very hard for those who had become familiar with the lines as they had originally appeared, to accept any change whatever. This is a feeling which must always be taken into consideration in any criticism made by those of us to whom the first form of a poem is the form by which we have learned to love it. In such cases we are hardly competent judges of the propriety or excellence of the alterations made. Our ears have been attuned by time and custom to the flow of certain words in a certain order. Anything which disturbs this melody which has become part of our mental equipment is apt to jar painfully upon the literary sense. The old associations have been broken up. The new ones have not only to be created—itself a work of time—but they must displace from remembrance and regard the old ones to which our ears have become accustomed. The music in which we delighted is lost, and we have little inclination to adapt ourselves to any new tune, even if judges, recognized by us as competent and impartial, should proclaim its superiority; and in such cases the

only impartial judges are those who come to the consideration of the two versions without having been previously familiar with either.

It was accordingly inevitable that many should be grieved by the changes made, who were far from unfriendly to the poet. Two of these criticisms are worth noting coming from the persons they did. In January, 1844, an article on Tennyson's two volumes appeared in the 'Democratic Review' published in New York. It was the production of Fanny Kemble Butler. Of Tennyson, as we have seen, she had been one of the most extravagant of the original admirers. As the poet was an intimate friend of her brother, John Mitchell Kemble, not only literary taste but family feeling would tend to make her a partisan. Naturally there was no restraint in the expression of her admiration for the genius which had been displayed in the new poems appearing then for the first time. But along with this went unhesitating condemnation of the alterations which had been made in the old ones. "He has changed," she wrote, "and in our opinion has very nearly ruined some of his best early poems, at the same time that he puts forth new ones incomparably superior to those at their unaltered best." She regarded this retrograde and progressive process, as she called it, the most singular mental phenomenon in the range of modern literature. All the alterations were in her eyes alterations for the worse. She was unable, for instance, to speak with patience of the changes made in one of the songs found in 'The Miller's Daughter.' The verses, she

thought only tolerable as they stood originally; as they now appeared, they were unmitigated twaddle.

It is a singular illustration of the force of association working in a person of superior intellect and of refined taste that preference could be given by Fanny Kemble to the conclusion of the choric song in 'The Lotos-Eaters,' as found in the old version, to the far more effective and poetical lines which were found in the new. The most virulent critic of Tennyson never exhibited much more pronounced evidence of incompetence than did here this enthusiastic admirer. Later in life she admitted that the changes she deplored did not appear deplorable to others, but distinct improvements. It is manifest that in regard to the excellence of the alterations made she had come to find herself in a hopeless minority. Her work entitled 'Records of a Girlhood' was published in 1878. In it she repeated her previous opinion in regard to these changes, or rather the feelings she had once had about them. But she further confessed that what had seemed to her desecrations did not seem so to the modern reader. "In justice to Tennyson," she said, "I must add that the present generation of his readers swear by *their* version of his poems as we did by ours, for the same reason,—they knew it first."

As being more open to fair difference of opinion, it may be worth while to set side by side the two versions of the song in 'The Miller's Daughter,' partly to show in small space something of the nature and extent of the changes made by the poet and partly

to give the reader an opportunity to decide for himself on their respective merits:

EDITION OF 1832

I wish I were her earring,
    Ambushed in auburn ringlets sleek,
(So might my shadow tremble
    Over her downy cheek,)
Hid in her hair, all day and night,
Touching her neck so warm and white.

I wish I were the girdle
    Buckled about her dainty waist,
That her heart might beat against me,
    In sorrow and in rest.
I should know well if it beat right,
I'd clasp it round so close and tight.

I wish I were her necklace,
    So might I ever fall and rise
Upon her balmy bosom
    With her laughter, or her sighs.
I would lie round so warm and light
I would not be unclasped at night.

EDITION OF 1842

It is the miller's daughter,
  And she is grown so dear, so dear,
That I would be the jewel
  That trembles at her ear;
For hid in ringlets day and night,
  I'd touch her neck so warm and white.

And I would be the girdle
About her dainty, dainty waist,
And her heart would beat against me,
In sorrow and in rest:
And I should know if it beat right,
I'd clasp it round so close and tight.

And I would be the necklace,
And all day long to fall and rise
Upon her balmy bosom,
With her laughter or her sighs,
And I would lie so light, so light,
I scarce should be unclasp'd at night.[1]

The other criticism came from an even more famous quarter. In a letter of July 13, 1842, Browning gave to Alfred Domett his opinion of the changes which had been made in this first volume, as well as of some

[1] In an article in 'The New London Literary Gazette' of August 25, 1827, on specimens of the early Greek poets, there is an English poem "formed from two or three fragments not inserted in the epigrams of Meleager." "I have endeavored," says the author of the article, "to give a specimen of a style of love-song so common among the Greek lyric poets." Then follow these verses:

I wish I were the bowl,
The bowl that she kisses,
I would breathe away my soul
In the goblet of blisses.

I wish I were a flower,
Or the dove which sings
In the evening bower
With sunset on her wings.

For if I were a flower,
I should sleep upon her breast;
And if I were a dove,
I would sing her to her rest.

And lovely her slumbers,
And sweet her dream should be,
And beautiful her waking,
If watched by me.

of the poems contained in the second. "I send with this," he wrote, "Tennyson's new vol., and, alas, the old with it—that is, what he calls old. You will see, and groan! The alterations are insane. *Whatever* is touched is spoiled. There is some woeful infirmity in the man—he was months buried in correcting the press of the last volume, and in that time began spoiling the new poems (in proof) as hard as he could. 'Locksley Hall' is shorn of two or three couplets. I will copy out from the book of somebody who luckily transcribed from the proof-sheet—meantime *one* line, you will see, I *have* restored—see and wonder! I have been with Moxon this morning, who tells me that he is miserably thin-skinned, sensitive to criticism (foolish criticism), wishes to see no notices that contain the least possible depreciatory expressions—poor fellow! But how good when good he is—that noble 'Locksley Hall,' for instance—and 'St. Simeon Stylites'—which I think perfect. . . . To think that he has omitted the musical 'Forget-me-not' song, and 'The Hesperides'—and the 'Deserted House'—and 'everything that is his,' as distinguished from what is everybody's."[1]

To men who have made themselves familiar with the changes which are found in these poems, it is not Tennyson's alterations that will seem insane but Browning's criticism. But these remarks of his render it a matter of moment to correct the error on this point into which he fell at this time as well as later. It is one, too, into which friends as well as enemies of the

[1] 'Browning and Domett,' edited by F. G. Kenyon, 1906, p. 40.

poet have been betrayed. Never assuredly was an author more sensitive to critical attack than was Tennyson, so far as his feelings were concerned. Never was one more independent of it in his action. The only maker of it to whose judgment he paid much heed was himself. Suggestions from friendly quarters he sometimes sought. Even those unsought he fully considered. But there is no evidence that anything, whether coming from favorable or unfavorable sources, determined, save in occasional instances, his own conclusions. On the contrary, the evidence is overwhelming that it did not. He sometimes looked with a sort of perverse fondness upon poems which his warmest admirers regarded with extreme disfavor. Not merely in spite of the attacks of the hostile, but against the remonstrances of the friendly he persisted in publishing and republishing pieces which it would have been to his credit to have dropped entirely. Hostile criticism had no perceptible effect in dictating the omissions or alterations which were found in the edition of 1842. The poems appearing in his first two ventures which he failed to republish there would have been thrown out in any case. For his feelings about some of those contained in the volume of 1830 we have at an early period the unimpeachable testimony of his most intimate friend. "They little know the while," wrote Hallam, after Wilson's review in 'Blackwood,' "that you despise the false parts of your volume quite as vehemently as your censors can, and with purer zeal, because with better knowledge."[1]

[1] 'Memoir,' Vol. I, p. 84.

But the opposite impression has been so long prevalent that it has become prevailing. The view indicated by it has been so stoutly held and so persistently proclaimed that the mere assertion of its falsity will seem to most men like a denial of the self-evident. Accordingly it becomes important to make a critical inquiry into the matter and to bring out the facts too unmistakably to admit of further question. This can be best done by an exposure of two representative misstatements of Tennyson's course, coming as these do from sources more than ordinarily authoritative. It will show beyond question that, however much the poet's feelings were outraged by attack, his action was never influenced by it. The first of these misstatements is found in the biography of Professor Wilson written by his daughter, Mrs. Gordon. In it occurs a comment upon the review in 'Blackwood' of Tennyson's first volume. "The young poet," wrote Mrs. Gordon, "although evidently nettled, received the criticism in good part." Whatever the daughter may have thought, the father, it will be seen later, did not deem that his criticism had been taken in good part, and still less did he take in good part the retort. Mrs. Gordon adds that the poet profited by the review. "On reading the paper," she wrote, "I observe that, with scarcely a single exception, the verses condemned by the critic were omitted or altered in after editions."

The remark does little credit to Mrs. Gordon's keenness of observation. Undoubtedly a number of poems which Wilson condemned were omitted from the edition of 1842. So also were a far larger number

of which he had expressed no opinion whatever. But not to the critic's praise or dispraise was this action of the poet attributable. In truth the omissions which Mrs. Gordon could not find and the alterations which she did find must be credited to imperfect examination or to imagination working under no restraint of fact. To dispose effectively of her assertions, it is the easiest course to take a brief journey to the dreary realm of statistics. The volume of 1830, reviewed by Wilson, contained precisely fifty-six pieces. Of these, twenty-four were reprinted in the edition of 1842. Consequently thirty-two were discarded. Of the fifty-six poems of this first volume Wilson had specifically mentioned thirty. Of the thirty specified, he had condemned eighteen, and had commended twelve. Of the eighteen censured six were reprinted in the edition of 1842. These were 'The Dying Swan' and the two songs to 'The Owl'; 'The Poet's Mind,' characterized by the critic as "partly prettyish but mainly silly"; 'The Merman,' "a sorry affair"; and 'The Mermaid,' "of an amorous temperament, and a strong Anti-Malthusian."

All of these, the harsh language employed by Wilson did not prevent Tennyson from reprinting; and if there are any alterations to be found in them, Mrs. Gordon's eyes are the only ones which have discovered them. There was indeed an omission of six lines in 'The Poet's Mind,' but the dropping of these was manifestly not caused by the criticism; for that was directed to the whole piece and not to any particular portion of it. Of the poems which Wilson commended

two were not included in the edition of 1842. One of these indeed,—'Hero to Leander'—was never reprinted in any authorized collection of Tennyson's works. Furthermore, it is to be added that of the twenty-six poems which Wilson did not mention either for praise or blame, nineteen were thrown out by the author's own decision. These statements are dry; but they are convincing. They show that in the choice of the poems he determined to discard or to retain, Tennyson made up his own mind independently. It is manifest from his course in this as in later acts that he paid little deference to the mind of his critics. In stating the facts just recorded there is no expression of opinion as to the justice of Wilson's views. They are given merely to point out their ineffectiveness in influencing the action of the poet.

The next is a far more flagrant instance of misstatement, for it lacks even the semblance of truth. It occurs in a letter written in February, 1845, by Browning to the woman later to become his wife. He was engaged in his favorite exercise of proclaiming his own independence of criticism. "For Keats and Tennyson," he wrote, "to 'go softly all their days' for a gruff word or two is quite inexplicable to me, and always has been. Tennyson reads the *Quarterly* and does as they bid him, with the most solemn face in the world—out goes this, in goes that, all is changed and ranged. Oh me!" Well might he have said "Oh me!"; for had he taken the pains to make even a superficial examination of the article in the 'Quarterly' and the poems as republished he would have

discovered that his assertion lacked even that decent homage to fact which characterizes respectable fiction. It sprang largely from his own inability to correct anything which he himself had once written, and the fancy he came to have in consequence that corrections made by others arose out of deference to the opinions of critics and not to the decisions of their own judgments which these writers had independently reached.

There is indeed palliation, though not pardon, for Browning's misstatement in an even then prevalent belief that Tennyson paid profound respect to Lockhart's criticisms and modified his poems so as to conform to them. This belief began early and flourishes even to this day with all the vigor which characterizes mendacity once started on its travels. It has been repeated again and again by writers both of good and of ill repute; by writers who were hostile to Tennyson, and by those who have been among his warmest admirers. Take two of the latter class. As early as 1845 Charles Astor Bristed, in a highly favorable criticism of the volumes of 1842, repeated this utterly baseless statement in speaking of the article in the 'Quarterly.'[1] "The harsh censure," he said, "was to him wholesome advice, which he has used to good purpose. Of all the passages assailed by the reviewer, there is but one which has not been either entirely expunged or carefully rewritten." This one was a line in 'The Dream of Fair Women' in the description of Iphigenia. Similar testimony was borne

[1] 'Knickerbocker Magazine,' June, 1845, Vol. XXV, p. 536.

by Andrew Lang as late as 1897.[1] "The illustrious poet," he wrote, "unlike any other poet known to history, altered the passages which gave such advantages to criticism." It will speedily be shown that the illustrious poet did nothing of the kind.

Unquestionably in the edition of 1842 many changes had been made in those of its poems which had appeared in the volume of 1832. Not only had there been omissions and additions; but in several of them alterations had taken place on a grand scale. Some of the pieces which Lockhart had attacked were withdrawn. Far more were withdrawn of which nothing whatever had been said. The action Tennyson took was not due to the dissatisfaction expressed by his reviewer with what he had done, but was due to his own dissatisfaction with it. No one was a severer critic of his own writings than he was himself. But in this particular case the question that concerns us is how far the changes made in the poems republished were due to Lockhart's criticism. To that of course could not be attributed the numerous additions which are found. To settle the dispute as to the omissions and alterations, we have again to betake ourselves to statistics. Let us consider first those which were not reprinted. Of the thirty poems contained in the edition of 1832, sixteen appeared in the edition of 1842. Fourteen consequently were discarded. Five of the discarded had been attacked by Lockhart; of the other nine he had made no mention. Of these five censured by him two would certainly have never appeared under

[1] A. Lang's 'Lockhart,' Vol. II, p. 88.

any circumstances in any edition brought out by Tennyson under his own supervision. One of these consisted of the lines to Christopher North, of which we know that he himself had become ashamed almost as soon as they were published. The other was the 'O Darling Room,' of which every admirer of the poet was then more or less ashamed.

Of the other three attacked by Lockhart and discarded by Tennyson, one was the sonnet with which the book opened. As the poet in the edition of 1842 did not include any of the sonnets contained in the volume of 1832—there were six in all—it is hardly reasonable to infer that the omission of this particular one was due to the criticism passed upon it in the 'Quarterly.' Another one of the discarded poems was the verses addressed to an unknown friend beginning "All good things have not kept aloof." The third was the poem entitled 'The Hesperides'—the only one of any length not included in the edition of 1842. In fact this piece never appeared in any edition of Tennyson's works during his lifetime. But besides these five discarded by the poet there were eight others attacked by Lockhart which were retained. These eight were 'The Lady of Shalott,' 'Mariana in the South,' 'Eleanore,' 'The Miller's Daughter,' 'Œnone,' 'The Palace of Art,' 'The Dream of Fair Women,' and 'The Lotos-Eaters.' The very titles of these pieces singled out for reprobation by Lockhart will give the modern reader a conception of the taste and acumen displayed by the critic.

Still, it may be and has been urged that while they

were not discarded, their character was so changed in consequence of the criticism they received that the effectiveness if not the justice of the attack was proved by the action taken by the poet. It accordingly becomes necessary here to explode this fiction also. Let us consider separately each of the eight poems condemned. 'Eleanore' and 'Mariana in the South' had been passed by Lockhart with censure merely, but with no detailed criticism. This was done, he assured us, because he "could make no intelligible extract." 'Eleanore' appeared in the edition of 1842 with the slightest possible alteration. The poem, accordingly, was left in its original unintelligibility. On the other hand, 'Mariana in the South' underwent very marked changes. The opening stanza, as the poem originally appeared, was struck out and another substituted. The fifth and sixth stanzas of the piece as it now stands were added. Furthermore in the body of the poem many important alterations were made. Still, as in the case of this piece nothing had been specified by Lockhart, nothing done to it in the way of omission, addition, or alteration in particulars can well be attributed to any remark of his. The same sort of examination, applied to 'The Lady of Shalott,' specifically criticised by him, will show a similar result. The words and phrases in it which had been marked for censure—in some instances most foolishly marked—were rarely changed at all. It is further safe to say that none were changed because they had been so marked. There were in the extracts he quoted eleven of these words and phrases which Lockhart

had italicized for the sake of holding them up to ridicule. Of these eleven, nine were retained, two were altered.

Essentially the same story can be told about 'The Miller's Daughter.' In this the changes were very numerous and very great throughout. For one of the songs contained in it—'The Forget-me-not' song deplored by Browning—an entirely different one was substituted. The opening stanza of the poem was dropped as were three others. These stanzas were all which Lockhart had ridiculed. Even of two of these four it would be more proper to say that they were condensed rather than omitted; and with the condensation certain words and phrases italicized by the critic were thrown out. Among these lines he had censured were the following two:

> The very air about the door
> Made misty with the floating meal.

What fault could be found which should cause them to be placed in italics in the review, it is hard for the modern reader to discover. It is giving too much credit to Tennyson's susceptibility to attack, extreme as it was, to fancy that he was led to discard them in consequence of the absurd criticism to which they had been subjected. But beside the four stanzas rejected, four others were cut out of which nothing had been said. Three others also were added. Furthermore, many were the minor changes made, which nothing in Lockhart's review had suggested.

Men who concede that Tennyson did not pay much

heed to Lockhart's criticism generally have, however, been found disposed to insist that in the case of 'Œnone' he did. This poem was so thoroughly revised and recast for the edition of 1842 that it was to some extent a new work. From it, as it originally appeared, Lockhart quoted twenty-six lines for ridicule. Of these twenty-six, eight disappeared in the revision. Eighteen were retained unaltered. In these eighteen retained could be found eight words and phrases which had been specifically selected for censure by being printed in italics. In not one of them was the slightest alteration made. But there was one peculiarity of the poem with which the critic had made himself especially merry. This was the formula, repeated again and again with slight variations:

Dear mother Ida, hearken ere I die.

Lockhart took pains to satisfy himself about the frequency of the occurrence of this line by counting it, whenever it appeared. Sixteen times he found it repeated. The fact he emphasized by italicizing the numeral. If he had taken the additional pains to count it correctly, his heart would have been further gladdened by finding that it did not occur sixteen times but seventeen. Bad as the smaller number was in Lockhart's eyes, Tennyson showed the abjectness of his deference to the critic by repeating the line nineteen times in the revision of 1842.

An examination of the three remaining poems—'The Lotos-Eaters,' 'The Palace of Art,' and 'The Dream of Fair Women'—reveals a similar state of

things. All these had been derisively mentioned by Lockhart; but the extracts from them were few. 'The Palace of Art' was thoroughly recast in the edition of 1842. Not merely were there in it numerous minor changes, but omissions, additions, and transpositions took place on a grand scale. In truth, over thirty stanzas of the poem, as it originally appeared, were discarded, and nearly the same number added. One is here a little puzzled by Lockhart's calling attention to the spelling *Petrarca* in one of the two quotations taken from this poem. He must surely have known that this was the name the poet bore in his own tongue. But if so, why italicize, as he did, the form? 'The Dream of Fair Women' also underwent great changes of all sorts though not so great as the preceding poem. But in all of these pieces not a single alteration can be traced even with probability, still less with certainty, to anything found in the review in the 'Quarterly.' Tennyson, in truth, could hardly have shown more distinctly his opinion of Lockhart's opinion, or rather his contempt for it, than by his treatment of the words and phrases on which his critic had sought to cast discredit by italicizing them. These were almost invariably retained even when occurring in poems in which numerous alterations of all sorts had been made.

Furthermore, phrases or passages which had undergone something more than the criticism conveyed by italics, which had indeed been made the subject of special banter, were left entirely unchanged. Two instances there are in the last two poems considered,

on which Lockhart laid special stress. He devoted a paragraph to the ridicule of the phrase "babe in arm," which occurred in the description of the Madonna in 'The Palace of Art.' This he compared to "lance in rest," "sword in arm," and spoke of it ironically as "a deep stroke of art." The respect which Tennyson showed to this criticism may be inferred from the fact that it not only occurred in the original edition but is found in every edition since down to the day of his death. Furthermore, he repeated it in 'The Princess."[1] Another illustration of the influence of the reviewer upon the poet can be seen in the remark made by the former upon the sacrifice of Iphigenia and in the action taken by the latter. Lockhart quoted from 'The Dream of Fair Women' the four lines following, in which certain changes were made by him in the punctuation to accentuate the ironic interpretation of them by the reviewer.

> The tall masts quivered as they lay afloat;
> The temples, and the people, and the shore;
> One drew a sharp knife through my tender throat—
> Slowly,—and *nothing more.*

"What touching simplicity—" was Lockhart's concluding comment on the extract—"what pathetic resignation—he cut my throat—'*nothing more!*' One might indeed ask, 'what *more*' she would have?" Yet in spite of this criticism the stanza, as it appeared in the edition of 1832, reappeared unaltered in the edition of 1842 and in every edition after that until the edition

[1] Canto VI, line 15.

of 1853. Other instances might be cited. Though less significant in themselves, they constitute collectively an instructive comment on the accuracy of Browning's assertion that "in goes this, out goes that, all is changed and ranged" at the bidding of the 'Quarterly.'

Undoubtedly Tennyson, like every other author, made alterations at the suggestion of friends or in consequence of the criticism of enemies. At times too they were unfortunate. In the poem of 'Lady Clara Vere de Vere' the first line of the couplet, as it originally read, ran as follows:

> The grand old gardener and his wife
> Smile at the claims of long descent.

This was changed in very late editions to the hopelessly prosaic line,

> The gardener Adam and his wife.

The alteration was made, we are told, "because of the frequent letters from friends asking me for explanation." Poetry will be in a sorry state if it is to be revised to adapt it to the comprehension of the unthinking and unintelligent. It was surely hardly worth while to change a fine line into a feeble one to accommodate the ignorance of men who had not heard of the garden of Eden. Still such instances are very rare. Enough has been shown to prove beyond question that Tennyson was not influenced in the alterations he made by hostile criticism, however keenly he felt it.

It is also easy to establish beyond cavil the truth of the further assertion that he was uninfluenced by friendly criticism when it came in conflict with the conclusions of his own judgment. We have seen that he discarded the poem of 'The Lover's Tale' from the volume of 1832, despite the entreaties of the one friend to whom he was most attached and in whose opinions he had the highest confidence. Both Hallam, and Thompson, the future Master of Trinity, remonstrated strongly as well as wisely against the epithet of "madman" applied to Bonaparte in the sonnet so entitled. For it they wished him to substitute "dreamer." But their wishes and their objections had no weight with the poet and "madman" was retained. The sonnet was dropped from the edition of 1842, and was not reprinted by him until 1872. It had little merit and represented mainly what Mill termed the vulgar pride of nationality in which Tennyson was always too much inclined to indulge. Again, while John Stuart Mill's review of his poems had paid the most cordial of tributes to the genius of their author, he had not hesitated to condemn several of the individual pieces as positive or comparative failures. Those censured numbered seventeen in all, though most of them were very short. When the edition of 1842 appeared six of the seventeen censured continued to be retained.

It is to be said in conclusion that no inconsiderable number of the early pieces not included in the volumes of 1842, were subsequently inserted by Tennyson in later editions of the poems or in his collected works.

Still, there was more than a score of these rejected pieces that he himself never reprinted. What the reasons were in individual cases which led to their inclusion or exclusion it is no easy matter to determine. Certain it is that several of those he refused to republish will seem to most men not inferior to many of those to which he gave the preference and in one or two cases distinctly superior. There were men among his early admirers who did not take kindly to his rejection of 'The Hesperides' from the edition of 1842. Yet in his refusal to reprint it he adhered all his life. It is far harder to understand the failure, already mentioned, to include the poem entitled 'Hero to Leander.' The following is its first stanza:

Oh go not yet, my love,
The night is dark and vast;
The white moon is hid in her heaven above,
And the waves climb high and fast.
Oh! kiss me, kiss me, once again,
Lest thy kiss should be the last.
Oh kiss me ere we part;
Grow closer to my heart.
My heart is warmer surely than the bosom of the main.

This is undoubtedly the best of the four stanzas constituting the poem; but the others are good enough to make the whole production one of distinctly higher grade than several he admitted later into his collected works.

CHAPTER XVI

RECEPTION OF THE POEMS OF 1842

Of the somewhat remarkable number of poetical works which came out in 1842, it has already been observed that the two volumes of Tennyson are to us the most memorable. It is now frequently said that they placed him at the head of contemporary English poets. So far as their ultimate effect is concerned, the assertion is correct. But in some quarters the mistaken belief has sprung up that this result was accomplished at once. Specifically it is true of the effect then wrought upon a limited number, and that number, too, belonging to the highest class of minds. But it was not so universally. The growth of Tennyson's acceptance by the public can be easily gauged by the difference between the enormous number of copies of the editions printed in the fifties to meet the enormous demand which had come to prevail, and the comparatively small number printed in the forties, especially in the early forties. In the latter case the sale was respectable as poetry sold then; but it was by no means remarkable. The first edition of the 'Poems' of 1842 consisted of but eight hundred copies. To exhaust this number took more than a year. We can get a fair conception of the modesty of the anticipations entertained by the poet himself from the fact

that nearly four months after the publication, he was communicating to a friend with a certain degree of exultation that he had been told at Moxon's that five hundred copies of his poems had been sold.[1] That evidently seemed to him a great success. The second edition which appeared in the middle of June, 1843, advanced the number over that previously printed to one thousand.

But though the constituency behind Tennyson was not at first large in numbers, so far as that is indicated by the sale of his works, it was remarkable both for its character and its intellect. To it belonged especially the young men of promise whose opinions were to be the opinions of the immediate future. One condition of things soon revealed itself which was to be repeated again and again in his literary career. The truth of Aristotle's dictum that the mass of men—he meant of course men cultivated and competent to form opinions of their own—were far better judges of poetry than any one man however eminent, has never been better illustrated than in the reception given to Tennyson's successive works. The critical estimate almost invariably lagged behind the estimate reached by the great body of intelligent readers. When the former was adverse—and in his case it often was adverse on the first publication of particular works—it was almost disdainfully set aside by the latter. Never was this fact brought out much more distinctly than in the instance of the 'Poems' of 1842 and 'The Princess' of 1847. Professional criticism

[1] Letter of September 8, 1842, in 'Memoir,' Vol. I, p. 212.

followed and followed reluctantly, and almost protestingly, popular appreciation. Tennyson's reputation advanced against a sullen opposition which insinuated a depreciatory estimate which at last it did not venture to proclaim openly.

It cannot be made too strongly emphatic that the success which Tennyson achieved during his whole career was never achieved by the aid of professional critics. It was the spontaneous tribute paid by intelligent and independent readers. In 1842 the reviewer of poetry hesitated; not so the lover of it. There is nothing more striking in the history of Victorian literature than the masterly manner in which the leading critical organs of that particular time, and even for years later, refrained from committing themselves too unreservedly as to the nature and degree of Tennyson's poetical achievement. They seemed at first dazed by the apparition of this luminary, which, so long in obscuration, had suddenly blazed in the literary heavens as a star of the first magnitude. There were none who expected to deal in unmixed praise. There were some prepared to scoff and ready to prove that the light by which a few erring souls appeared to be dazzled was a mere meteoric exhalation which would speedily vanish from view. But it soon became apparent that the temper of the educated public was such as to make an action of this sort perilous. Never was the critical fraternity more at a loss as to what they should say, or rather what it was safe for them to say. It took the large majority of them a good deal of time to make up their minds what

to do. They were really waiting for public opinion to declare itself unmistakably; they themselves did not attempt to lead it. This refusal on their part to commit themselves unreservedly was remarked at the time by Fanny Kemble in the review, already mentioned, which she wrote of the edition of 1842 for an American periodical. "The public," she said, "has been quicker than the reviewers in appreciating Mr. Tennyson's merits."

Only two of the leading critical weeklies paid any speedy attention to the work. The first to review it was 'The Examiner.' Its notice[1] appeared about a fortnight after the publication of the volumes. It was undoubtedly written by its literary editor, John Forster. His article was in general commendatory, and indeed might fairly be called cordial. Still it exhibited none of that enthusiasm of appreciation or rather of panegyric which he had previously bestowed upon Browning. But though somewhat colorless, it was discriminating; it praised what was worthy of praise and its censure was given to pieces which deserved censure. About a week later followed in 'The Spectator' the only other early notice of the work in a periodical of importance. It was manifestly too early for the reviewer to gain any acquaintance with the volumes he set out to criticise. He labored under the impression that the poems contained in them were little more than a reprint of what appeared before. "These elegant little volumes," he said,

1 'Examiner,' May 28, 1842.

"whose contents at first sight appear to be original, are discerned on examination to be a corrected, revised, and enlarged edition of the author's Poems." Such was the opening sentence in which he recorded this notable discovery. Still he felt that in spite of the lack of novelty, poetry was not so rife in the land that the appearance of the work should be allowed to pass in silence. The opinions of a critic who, not content with the possession of ignorance, started out with the proclamation of it, were not likely to be marked by any originality of treatment. Naturally he rehashed the stale comment on the two previous volumes which had long come to serve as a means for saving the reviewer from the necessity of using his own brains. But as one of apparently only two critics who has reckoned 'The Skipping Rope' among Tennyson's better pieces, his notice deserves full recognition. "Among the elite of the volumes," he wrote, "may be reckoned most of the poems in the nature of ballads or pastorals—for Tennyson is strongest upon old or rustic English grounds; a few of the lighter personal poems, as The Skipping Rope, and some not reducible to any class, as The Talking Oak. The gem of the whole for variety, delicate perception of character, rustic grace, spirit and pathos, is the pastoral tale embraced in The May Queen and its two sequels."

These two notices remained for a long time the only ones which appeared in any periodical of distinct repute. There was for a while indeed a somewhat ominous silence in most of the leading organs of critical opinion. "As to Alfred's book," wrote Fitz-

Gerald to Frederick Tennyson on the sixteenth of August, "I believe it has sold well: but I have not seen him for a long while, and have had no means of hearing about the matter except from Thompson, who told me that very many copies had been sold at Cambridge, which indeed will be the chief market for them. Neither have I seen any notice of them in print except that in the Examiner; and that seemed so quiet that I scarce supposed it was by Forster."[1] This was written, as is seen, three months after the publication of the poems. Even then one of the warmest admirers of the author fancied that the chief market for them would be in Cambridge. It is clear that at that period no expectation was entertained of the success which the work was to have. This feeling existed, too, in spite of the fact that individual poems even then were gaining wide currency through the agency of the newspaper press.

Cambridge, however, failed to fulfil FitzGerald's prophecy of continuing to be the chief market for the sale of the poems. It shows indeed how far from general had been Tennyson's previous repute that he was hardly known at all at the sister university during the ten years of silence. Bradley, the dean of Westminster, tells us that previous to the publication of the edition of 1842, the men of whom they talked at Oxford were Keble, Shelley, Byron, and Wordsworth.[2] But all this was speedily reversed after the appearance of the Tennyson volumes. It

1 'Letters and Literary Remains' of Edward FitzGerald, Vol. I, p. 98.
2 'Memoir,' Vol. I, p. 206.

was mainly his poetry that then came up for consideration and discussion. It took the university by storm. The change was significant of the sentiment prevailing everywhere among the young and highly educated. They celebrated Tennyson in season and out of season not as the great coming poet but as the poet who had come. The fervency of admiration expressed by them—it is largely reflected in the correspondence of the period, so far as it has been published—was in striking contrast to the frequently indifferent, usually patronizing, and occasionally hostile attitude of the critical press. Against the cool tone of the reviews was the ardent appreciation of the general public. That indeed had found out the greatness of the poet long before it dawned upon the consciousness of its self-constituted literary advisers. Men in general who did not feel that they had any reputation at stake for critical perspicacity expressed their admiration unhesitatingly and enthusiastically. Single poems from the work and extracts of poems were circulating far and wide. Hence they were early made known to the reading public out of all proportion to the sale of the work itself. The praise of critics was little needed; their blame was certainly little regarded. Even before FitzGerald had written the letter just quoted, another one of the periodicals, with a reputation to take care of, had mustered up sufficient courage to express a measured approbation without danger of destroying its own reputation for discriminating sobriety of judgment.

This periodical was 'The Athenæum.' On August 6,

a review of the work appeared in its columns. It was favorable on the whole, though the critic was careful to maintain a proper decorum by not expressing any wild enthusiasm. It expressed the usual regret at the interpolations and alterations which had been made in the contents of the previous volumes and at the omission of certain poems which they had contained. It would, it declared, have retained the lines to Christopher North in spite of their pertness and the 'Darling Room' in spite of its puerility rather than have lost 'The Deserted House.' It was obliged further to dissent from the opinion of those who praised the poet as having emancipated himself from the crotchets which distinguished his earlier efforts. His newer offerings supplied as many as those he had expunged. This was doubtless aimed at the notice in 'The Examiner.' With the other likes and dislikes conveyed in the article, it is not worth while to dally. The general conclusion is all that needs to be given. With the various critical abatements to Tennyson's genius which the reviewer's strict sense of justice compelled him to make, he nevertheless felt justified in asserting that the extracts from the volumes substantiated the writer's claim to a high place among modern poets. To a high place among modern poets was the result reached by this thoughtful critic after three months of time and apparently of some moments of reflection. Incidentally however he made one most significant admission. Everything which he had said, he remarked, had been already anticipated. His work was largely one of supererogation; he could do no

more than furnish additional evidence. "Though we are late in noticing Mr. Tennyson's new volume," he observed, "neither critics, readers, nor author will suffer from our delay or self-denial. Large as have been the quotations of our contemporaries, they have left still a treasury unrifled!" But the reason given for one of his omissions is noticeable as showing how rapidly popular appreciation had outrun critical. Not a line was quoted from 'Locksley Hall' and one or two other poems. That course was avowedly taken on the ground that they were already familiar to every one.

The critic of 'The Athenæum' was Chorley.[1] The review in the other literary weekly—'The Literary Gazette,' now fully entered upon its downward road—did not appear until the nineteenth of November. It had taken it six months to make up what it deemed its mind. Six minutes would have been ample for the result it reached. This review must be described as not only ridiculous in itself—that might be expected from our knowledge of the editor, who in this case was very certainly the writer of the criticism—but as being under the circumstances a peculiarly impudent performance coming from a man who had devoted several columns to depreciation of the volume of 1832 with as much severity as his limited intellectual powers would permit. 'The Literary Gazette' would have been glad to attack the work unreservedly; it lacked the courage. Most of its article was given up to the

[1] 'Henry Fothergill Chorley,' by H. G. Hewlett, 1873, Vol. II, p. 2.

task of finding fault—which had now begun to grow wearisome—with the changes which had been made in the poems as previously printed. It expressed regret for the disappearance of some pieces and for the alterations in others which years before had been furiously assailed by the same writer in the same periodical. Hardly a word was said about the contents of the second volume beyond the assertion that it contained many new beauties. The only value the review has is the reluctant evidence it bears to the place which Tennyson had now begun to occupy in the public estimation.

Jerdan's connection with 'The Literary Gazette' did not cease until 1850. He was, however, beginning already to be "the time-worn but not reverend individual" who called upon Hawthorne just as the novelist chanced to be reading, "between asleep and awake," what he justly termed the "wretched twaddle" of his visitor's autobiography. It is a singularly suggestive tribute to the advantages of anonymousness that this "disreputable senior," as Hawthorne styled him, should for a long period of years have held a commanding position in critical literature. He had come in consequence to believe that great weight was to be attached to his opinion. There was a delicious impertinence in this fat-witted writer setting out to patronize Tennyson as he did in this review. He conceded that he was a "true and sterling poet." That was all the more reason for subjecting him to discipline. We love him, he wrote, "just well enough to 'chasten him' for his faults, as

we have done before time;—and shall continue so to do, until he leaves off his evil practices.'' There was a fine affectation of friendliness in assuring the poet how many of his critics had ''in the kindest manner'' taken pains to point out ''the unsightly blots with which he had disfigured his pages.'' ''We may be wrong,'' he concluded, ''in ranking him among the foremost of our young poets, as one whose step is near that throne which must ere long be vacant; and whose own fault it will be if he misses the crown to which he is 'heir-apparent.' '' The critic doubtless meant heir presumptive. ''For,'' he added with fine critical impartiality, ''there are others who, with steady eye and firm hand are slowly hewing their way to the same height.''[1]

Nevertheless it gives from another point of view an idea of the little importance that Tennyson still had in the eyes of a large portion of the public that no review of the 'Poems' of 1842 appeared in one of the three leading politico-literary weeklies which were then in existence. This was 'The Atlas,' held by many to be the ablest of all. On the other hand, it may be regarded as proof of the impression which Tennyson had made upon a large portion of the public and the importance he had suddenly assumed in its eyes that the quarterlies no longer deemed it inconsistent with their dignity, but actually felt it incumbent on their position to devote special articles to the review of his poems. In each case, too, the work of criticism was entrusted to some one connected

[1] 'Literary Gazette,' November 19, p. 788.

with the author by ties of near or remote personal acquaintance. This indeed was not a proceeding which tended to produce an undue estimate of his achievement. In no case did the enthusiasm of friendship wanton into extravagant eulogy. Perhaps in no case was it permitted to do so. In truth, in reading these criticisms, one is reminded of the remark of Rogers that if you wish to have your works *coldly* reviewed, get your intimate friend to write an article upon them.

Three reviews there were which appeared in periodicals of this class during the year 1842. These were the work of John Sterling, of Richard Monckton Milnes, and of Leigh Hunt. They came out respectively in the 'Quarterly,' the 'Westminster,' and the 'Church of England Quarterly.' The first to appear was that of John Sterling. This was published in the number for September. We have been frequently told that this periodical made amends for its contemptuous attack upon the volume of 1832 by the appreciative criticism which it now published. For this very reason it has been made a subject of exceedingly laudatory mention, especially by those who have manifestly never read it. It could not indeed have been an altogether grateful thing to Lockhart to open the 'Quarterly' to a friendly review of the work of the man whose reputation he had set out years before to demolish and which for a time it was believed by many that he had demolished. The dose must have been a bitter one to swallow. Still, as it apparently had to be taken, it was made as palatable as possible

to the patient. Lockhart has constantly been praised for his generosity in admitting to the columns of the periodical over which he presided this thoughtful and favorable article, as it has been termed. To neither of the two epithets is it really entitled.

Thoughtful certainly is one of the most inappropriate of words with which to describe it. On the contrary, with an appearance of profundity, it is really shallow. Its author owes to friends a reputation which it would not have been in his own power to acquire. His memory has been consecrated to posterity by the pen of a man of genius. Shortly before this period his name, as we shall see later, had been solemnly placed in the limited roll of true English poets by one of the most influential critics of the age, if not then its most influential critic. Tennyson himself had been asked by implication to equal him if he could. From Sterling, indeed, great things had been anticipated from the outset. He was to a marked degree a representative of that not infrequent type of men whose spoken words produce an impression which is never borne out by their written. They somehow convey the idea that they are going to accomplish something remarkable, but never actually accomplish anything worthy of particular mention. There is no question as to the charm of Sterling's personal presence and the belief in the greatness of his ability which he inspired. It affected many of the most eminent of his contemporaries, perhaps all of them who came within the sound of his voice. It is the written word that fails. When he set out to commu-

nicate to the reader what had so charmed the hearer, the beauty of it and the effectiveness of it somehow vanished. Hence the inability of the men who did not know him to understand the enthusiasm of those who did. Hence his own failure in life. He died comparatively young. Still when he died, he had lived long enough to demonstrate that his performance would always lag far behind his promise. He never produced a single work which contemporaries cared to cherish, still less posterity. Sterling's writings, in truth, show that the highest rank he could ever have hoped to attain would have been that of a 'Quarterly' reviewer; and his poetry belongs to that ephemeral class of pieces which live their short life in the pages of magazines.

Nowhere does his real lack of critical insight display itself more distinctly than in many parts of this particular review. Much of it was taken up with a general discussion of poetry which had no more to do with Tennyson's than with that of any other writer. Indeed it seemed to be with difficulty that Sterling refrained from giving up the whole of his article to a criticism of Wordsworth as he did a portion of it. Much of it, too, was devoted to those poems of Tennyson which had been long before the public. About these comparatively brief mention would seem to have been all that was required. Still, with these Sterling had had time to make himself familiar; and it is about them generally that his critical opinion was happiest and most worthy of consideration. For one thing in particular we may be thankful. He refrained from

echoing the cuckoo cry which had been going on of deploring the alterations which had been made in the poems previously published. In general he commended these changes. He found fault with several of these early pieces, especially those headed with the names of women. They were, as he expressed it, mere "moonshine maidens." Others of them are cavalierly—and as it seems to me rightfully—disposed of as good enough for publication but not good enough to spend upon them detailed criticism. But one bad slip there was in his criticism of these early poems. This was the utterly inadequate, not to say absurd notice he gave of the 'Ode to Memory,' which had excited, in particular, the warmest praise of Wilson. Sterling concluded his remarks upon it with quoting its six final lines. These in his opinion exhibited Tennyson's unfitness for the production of what he called "Orphic song," whatever he meant by that Orphic utterance. "Philosophy," he wrote, "that sounds all depths, has seldom approached a deeper *bathos.*" No other word could have given a truer idea not of the poem, but of his criticism of it.

One further merit Sterling's article had. He recognized the great advance which had been made by the poet as shown in the pieces constituting the second volume. For many of them—especially the 'Idylls'—he had unqualified praise. 'The Gardener's Daughter,' 'Dora,' and 'Locksley Hall,' he specially singled out for eulogium. But along with the lavish commendation of certain poems went some of the most extraordinary judgments about others which ever

found their way into print from a reputable quarter. It seems so hard to believe that they could have come from the pen of a friend and admirer, that one is tempted to suspect that the language underwent more or less of modification at the hands of the editor. There is in truth a singular tone throughout the whole review. Few poems that are praised are praised without a qualification. Such a piece was well; but it might have been so much better; or it was inferior to something that somebody else had written. In truth, the curious inaptitude—almost partaking of the nature of ineptitude—to penetrate into the poet's meaning, which had been exhibited in the remark previously quoted upon 'St. Agnes,' was frequently manifested here on a grand scale. Sterling praised 'Ulysses' highly. But why, he asked, should not the poem have been written instead upon some one of the great modern voyagers, like Columbus, Gama, or even Drake? Why should it not indeed? The man who does not feel the absolute inappropriateness of any such substitution can hardly be expected to be made to see it by any process of reasoning.

To 'Godiva' Sterling also took exception. Admirably well done he admitted it to be; but the singularity and barbarousness of the fact related did not make it fit to be told in verse. The same feeling was even more strongly expressed about 'St. Simeon Stylites.' The subject, we were assured, was entirely inappropriate for poetry. "She has better tasks," said the critic, "than to wrap her mantle round a sordid, greedy lunatic." There are expressions of opinion

even more singular than these. 'The Palace of Art' was "a many-colored mistake." 'The Two Voices' was a long and dull production, a dispute on immortality which added nothing to our previous knowledge—of which Sterling had apparently a good deal—and which in substance might better have been given in three pages, or rather in one, than in thirty. The Moralities, indeed, as he called the poems of this nature, almost all appeared to him as decided and remarkable failures. He had further a rather poor opinion of the 'Morte d'Arthur.' It is a further illustration of Tennyson's sensitiveness to criticism that he told his friend Allingham twenty-five years later that he had been prevented from doing his Arthur epic in twelve books by this silly criticism of Sterling. "I had it all in my mind," he said, "could have done it without any trouble. The King is the complete man, the Knights are the passions."[1] Nor was Sterling altogether satisfied with 'The Talking Oak.' "An ancient oak," he sagely observed, "that is won by a poet to utter its Dodonæan oracles, would hardly, we conceive, be so prolix and minute in its responses."

The specimens of Sterling's criticisms have been given here on a somewhat large scale because this article has been usually spoken of as a specially favorable review of the 'Poems' of 1842. It has been further characterized as an *amende honorable* on the part of Lockhart. To neither of these characterizations has it any real claim. By its contrast with the previous review in the 'Quarterly' it may be called favorable.

[1] William Allingham's 'Diary,' 1907, under 1867, p. 150.

It is perhaps as cordial a criticism as could be expected from the man who had failed over the man who had succeeded; but it was not really cordial. Still by way of contrast, it made a good deal of an impression upon the popular mind; for the wonder was that anything save disparagement could come from the quarter in which it appeared. Its grudging praise was accordingly exalted into panegyric. To be sure, the effect of the many individual censures was to some extent counteracted by frequent commendation of the work as a whole. But particulars always make more impression than generals; and in spite of the praise lavished in a loose way upon the poet, it is doubtful if the article in question, if taken by itself, would have done as much towards extending Tennyson's reputation with the public as a whole, as it would towards detracting from it in the minds of those whose knowledge of him was limited entirely to what was here said. Much indeed of the special criticism contained in it could hardly have come from a mind that was not in many ways essentially prosaic. For him, too, who is disposed to rely upon the opinion of others for his own literary opinions, there is something startling in the contrast presented here of the estimate taken by Sterling on particular pieces and those expressed a little later by Fanny Kemble in her previously mentioned review of these poems. In her eyes 'The Talking Oak' was a "work of absolute perfection." "It is faultless," she added. Furthermore 'The Two Voices' is described as "Mr. Tennyson's finest poem."[1]

[1] 'Democratic Review,' January, 1844, p. 77.

Nor was the review which followed in the 'Westminster' for October of an enthusiastic character, though it was the work of a personal friend, Richard Monckton Milnes, and was signed with his initials. It is indeed far warmer in its praise than the article in the 'Quarterly.' Still it is slight in texture and character, though we may be thankful that, unlike Sterling's review, it did not affect a profundity which it did not possess. Its insufficiency appears perhaps more glaring to us because of its inferiority in appreciation and insight to the already mentioned article of John Stuart Mill which had appeared years before in the periodical with which the 'Westminster' had been united. One or two peculiar specimens of Milnes's criticisms may be worth citing. He would like to have had 'St. Simeon Stylites' out of the volume. He also thought 'The Talking Oak' somewhat too long—a difficulty which lapse of time seems to have removed entirely. The review is, however, more especially noteworthy to us now for the little expectation of the success of the venture that was entertained among the author's closest friends. "Mr. Tennyson's poems," wrote Milnes, "will, we doubt not, obtain such attention as the circumstances of the time permit to be given to poetry." In this equivocal prognostic once more appears that then prevalent distrust of the success of any production in the form of verse, of which there has already been so frequent occasion to give illustration.

Of the reviews which appeared in the quarterlies of this year, the poorest in all respects was that by

Leigh Hunt.[1] During his career, Hunt had been made the subject of a good deal of silly and occasionally of malignant criticism. But he was never the recipient of more of the former variety than he himself contributed on this occasion. He went so far as to repeat the old rigmarole about Tennyson's affectations, his use of hyphens and other assumed peculiarities. These, men of sense were now beginning to leave to fifth-rate critics, by whom they regularly continued to be reproduced for years to come. Hunt reproached Tennyson for having left out some of his second and third best productions while retaining most of those peculiarly objectionable. Consequently his first volume constituted neither an entire collection nor a thoroughly satisfactory selection. He furthermore did not recognize any advancement in the new volume upon the best to be found in the former two, though he conceded that there was negative improvement "in the articles of fantasticism and whimsicality." His favorite was 'The Two Voices,' the production which Sterling had found unnecessarily long and unreasonably dull. This Hunt was at first disposed to think proved an advance. On looking closer, however, he discovered that 1833 was given as the date of its composition. He was consequently denied the consolation of belief in the poet's progress. He thought it would be well for him to get out a new volume which if less in bulk would have a greater real abundance. "He is a genuine poet in his degree," was the opinion

1 'The Church of England Quarterly Review,' Vol. XII, pp. 361-376.

with which he concluded. It is manifest from the whole article that "his degree" was not a high one in Hunt's estimation, apparently not so high as his own. Certain it is from some of his later utterances that it took him a long time to learn that Tennyson was a greater poet than himself. Perhaps he never came to understand how much greater a one he was, though he must have become aware before his death that the belief of that sort met with universal acceptance.

The 'Edinburgh' was the last of the great quarterlies to review the work. Its notice did not appear until 1843 in the number for April, which came out in the middle of that month. At the time the second edition of the 'Poems' was going to press. The criticism had been delayed by the absence of its author, James Spedding, who during several months of 1842 was in America. As soon as the negotiations for the treaty of Washington were completed, Spedding returned. His article was more outspoken in the praise of the work than any one of the others which had appeared in the quarterlies. It was, in truth, as enthusiastic as it was allowed to be; but it was not allowed to be too enthusiastic. From the editor, Macvey Napier, Spedding had obtained leave to review the 'Poems.' But coupled with this consent was the condition that he would not seek to commit the periodical to a too undue estimate of what the author had already accomplished or to any prophecies as to what he might yet be expected to accomplish. The reputation of the "Review" must be preserved at all hazards.

Cordial, therefore, as was his criticism in comparison with those found in the other quarterlies, it was not permitted to be too cordial. Spedding had promised to be good, and earnestly tried to be good. But with all his self-restraint he found that in one instance he had gone too far. A sentence in the concluding paragraph of his article, as originally written, underwent at the chastening hand of the editor, an alteration "slight in itself" he said, "but considerable in effect and significance." "Powers are displayed in these volumes," he had written, "adequate to the production of a very great work." This sentence was modified to read "Powers are displayed in these volumes, adequate, if we do not deceive ourselves, to the production of a great work." The change was hardly worth making or worth noticing when made. When, however, Spedding came to republish this article in 1879 in his volume of 'Essays and Discourses,' he restored the original reading, the reputation of the "Review" being no longer at stake by the adoption of this course.

It is clear that in writing this article Spedding had had in mind certain criticisms which charged the poet with the extravagances which in the view of some had disfigured the early poems. To a certain extent there was foundation for an accusation of the sort. From the very outset there were pieces contained in the edition of 1842 against the insertion of which his strongest friends had protested. Their remonstrances had no effect upon the man who has been held up to us as altering or omitting lines and passages to suit

the views of hostile critics. There was unquestionably justification for this attitude in regard to certain productions. Especially was it true of those written in a lighter vein. While Tennyson, rarely as he chose to resort to it, had the power of producing trenchant satire, there was never a great poet more unfitted than he for the composition of those elegant trifles which go with us under the foreign title of *vers de société.* He could not write his best save under the pressure of deep feeling. It was consequently no personal hostility which dictated the condemnation of certain pieces which he persisted in retaining. "I agree with you," wrote FitzGerald to Pollock, on May 22, 1842, "quite about the skipping-rope, &c. But the bald men of the Embassy would tell you otherwise. I should not wonder if the whole theory of the Embassy, perhaps the discovery of America itself, was involved in that very poem. Lord Bacon's honesty may, I am sure, be found there. Alfred, whatever he may think, can not trifle—many are the disputes we have had about his powers of badinage, compliment, waltzing, &c. His smile is rather a grim one. I am glad the book is come out, though I grieve for the insertion of these little things, on which reviewers and dull readers will fix; so that the right appreciation of the book will be retarded a dozen years."[1]

FitzGerald's criticism was just, but his forebodings were far from being realized. It is significant of the hold which Tennyson had gained almost at a stroke over his generation that none of these few objection-

[1] 'Letters and Literary Remains of Edward FitzGerald,' Vol. I, p. 95.

able pieces were seized upon in any quarter to turn his whole work into ridicule. They were quietly ignored. It took no dozen years, as FitzGerald had feared and foretold, for the educated public to appreciate the new poems brought to its attention, though the attention of critics had been largely confined to the old ones. For it was the contents of the second volume which raised Tennyson to the proud position which he was soon to hold. This second volume it is which comprises a large share of his poetry which has become a part of the permanent riches of our literature. It contained in all twenty-nine titles. It opened with the 'Morte d'Arthur.' In it were to be found pieces so diverse in character as the idyllic 'Gardener's Daughter' and 'Dora' on the one side, and such metaphysical questionings as 'The Two Voices' and 'The Vision of Sin' on the other. Scattered through the volume were 'St. Simeon Stylites,' 'Sir Galahad,' 'Ulysses,' 'The Talking Oak,' 'Godiva,' and numerous other poems, diverse in character but differing only in the degree of their sustained excellence. In truth, one secret of the success of the work was that it contained so many pieces suited to different and differing orders of mind. We who have become familiar with them, as with a tale that has been told scores of times, are little able to realize the impression they made upon that generation of young and ardent spirits to whom they came with the suddenness of an inspired revelation.

Individuals naturally had their preferences for particular pieces. But one poem there was which

became at once known throughout the English-speaking world. This was 'Locksley Hall.' The popularity it achieved was instantaneous. It was reprinted and circulated everywhere. Nor has the favor of it gained at the very outset ever suffered serious diminution. This is not to maintain that the piece in question is Tennyson's greatest work any more than it is his longest. There are others of his productions which display characteristics of a higher grade of achievement. Still this is the one poem which has appealed to the widest circle of sympathies and tastes; and so long as youth continues a portion of life, so long is likely to last the popularity of a production which embodies the hopes and dreams, the experiences and the aspirations of youth. For this one reason alone 'Locksley Hall' will never lack readers and admirers in any and every age. Forster in his early review in 'The Examiner' anticipated the general contemporary verdict in asserting that this "grand poem," as he called it, was likely to become the favorite piece of the whole collection. Such it became at once; such it remained. As late as 1850 Charles Kingsley spoke of it as the one production which had had the "most influence on the minds of the young men of our day."[1]

Forster's prediction accordingly turned out to be true. But at the time it appeared there were special reasons which contributed to the unbounded popularity of 'Locksley Hall.' No other poem interpreted so fully the spirit of the age, its unrest, its hopes, and aspirations, its boundless belief in what the future

[1] 'Fraser's Magazine,' Vol. XLII, p. 249, September, 1850.

had in store, and its equally boundless belief in its ability to accomplish all that it dreamed. The period was one of exultant anticipation. This feeling, it was believed, was not the vague mental intoxication which heralded the approach of the French Revolution, but a just expectation of the future based upon a calm and clear-sighted survey of the forces that were then in operation for the improvement of mankind. Modern science had begun to enter upon its career of immeasurable conquest. It had already accomplished much and was fairly reckless in its promises of what further it was to accomplish. Distance of space seemed already on the road to annihilation through the further application of steam to motive power. Electricity was already bringing the most distant regions of the earth into the closest proximity of intercourse. The barriers that parted man from man and nation from nation were in consequence speedily to be burst asunder. These wonder-working achievements of science it was that held out the hope of a happy solution of the numerous vexing problems which had long been lying heavy on the hearts of all who thought and felt.

Accordingly as a result of these transforming processes, when at last they had been brought into full and active operation, little limit was placed on the moral and political progress of humanity. Under the influence of these agencies, life would be made purer and loftier. A better race than ours would come to inherit the earth, men would be braver and nobler than now and women fairer and purer. That younger day was about to dawn when the conventions that

made man the sport of the accidents of birth and fortune were destined to disappear; that younger day which, in the fulness of time, when war had ceased, was to witness the federation of man, the parliament of the world. It was a fascinating picture which the youthful poet held before the minds of men ready to sympathize with its most glowing promises. It was and perhaps will always remain a gorgeous vision to uplift the hearts of enthusiasts and to inspire the efforts of reformers. But when it appeared it was in strictest accord with the dominant feeling of the younger generation of the time. In its glowing lines were recorded the optimistic views which prevailed about the future of the race. It is little wonder accordingly that an age which found its most cherished ideals expressed in loftiest language should have welcomed with enthusiasm the poem and placed the poet in the highest rank of living authors.

The truth is that the success which came to Tennyson in the first instance and remained the secret of his continuous popularity at times in face of frequent depreciation or intermittent attack, was largely due to the fact that he mirrored, as did no other poet of his period, the changing feelings and the varying moods of the generations to which he successively appealed. As in the 'Locksley Hall' of 1842 he reflected the hopes and aspirations of the era of his youth, so in the 'Locksley Hall' of 1886 he reflected the fears and disappointment of the generation which had succeeded. The optimism of the earlier time had given place to the despondency, almost partaking of

the nature of pessimism, which had come largely to characterize the later. This second poem has often been termed a palinode. It is a palinode in so far as it gives a vivid picture of the change which had come over the minds of men, as they contrasted the realities which confronted them with the high-wrought expectation which had once been cherished of the brilliant results that were to follow man's increasing conquests over the forces of nature. Reflected accordingly in the later poem was the reaction of the closing years of the century against the hope and confidence of its prime. The gods in whom men had been taught to trust had turned out to be vain gods. Distance of space and length of time were, it is true, on the road to annihilation. Luxuries once deemed possible only for the few had become the indispensable necessities of the many. Marvels, once even undreamed of as belonging to the realm of reality, had shrunk by usage into the most matter-of-fact commonplace. Much had been added in many ways to man's material comfort. But how about man himself? Was he who was whirled fifty miles an hour along the Thames any wiser or better than he who more than a score of centuries ago sauntered slowly by the banks of the Ilissus? It was inevitable that the conviction should come that the material agencies from which so much had been expected, while they might increase man's resources and capabilities, could not of themselves add either to his real happiness or to his moral elevation; that the progress of humanity would be no result of external forces triumphing over the inert resistance

of matter, but of the slow processes of those internal changes which purify and elevate the soul; that the uplifting of the individual must invariably precede the uplifting of the race; and that he accomplishes most for the regeneration of the world who in his sphere, whether high or humble, according to his means, whether vast or limited, gives up his life to the service of his fellow men.

But no disturbing feelings of this nature were prevalent in the earlier time. So great indeed was the interest inspired by this poem that it became a favorite belief of some that Tennyson was recording in it his own personal experience. In a review of his poems several years after the publication of the volumes of 1842, Gilfillan with that fine critical perspicacity of the sort he was wont to display spoke of this particular piece as telling "a tale of unfortunate passion with a gusto and depth of feeling, which (unless we misconstrue the mark of the branding iron) betray more than a fictitious interest in the theme."[1] Still later Taine made a suggestion to the same effect in his 'History of English Literature'—a book which would be as valuable as it is delightful, had it more frequently occurred to the author that it was desirable to read the works on which he set out to pass judgment. "Personal memories, they said, had furnished the matter of *Maud* and *Locksley Hall*," are his words. But this attribution was not limited to the author himself. On account of the wide popularity of the poem, several persons were induced to pose as its hero

[1] 'Tait's Edinburgh Magazine,' Vol. XIV, p. 230, April, 1847.

or heroine. There was manifestly no lack of candidates for this honor. Tennyson's son represents his father as saying that some time after he had left Cambridge, two undergraduates were walking together when one of them chanced to mention the poet's name. The other replied that he hated the man; for he himself was the unhappy hero of Locksley Hall. "It is," he said, "the story of my cousin's love and mine, known to all Cambridge when Mr. Tennyson was there, and he put it into verse." Dates contribute a good deal of perplexity to this particular tale of woe. As 'Locksley Hall' did not appear until ten years after Tennyson left Cambridge, it is hard to see how his student contemporary could have been much afflicted by the report of his unfortunate experience unless he had achieved a noteworthy place in the history of the university for the length of time he remained an undergraduate. But this was merely one of several instances. Mary Russell Mitford, for example, tells us in a letter of August 7, 1847, that "William Harness had been dining with the heroine of 'Locksley Hall' and her husband."[1] Doubtless there were many similar heroes and heroines of small circles whose names have never reached the ears of the public.

1 'Letters of Mary Russell Mitford,' 2d series, edited by Henry Chorley, 1872, Vol. I, p. 235.

CHAPTER XVII

AMERICAN RECEPTION OF THE POEMS OF 1842

The American edition of Tennyson's poems followed a few weeks after the appearance of the English. It came from the Boston house of Ticknor & Company. Doubtless by an arrangement with the poet or his London publisher, the edition was almost an exact reproduction of the one brought out on the other side of the Atlantic. It was hardly to be expected that the work would meet with the success in America which had greeted it in England, in spite of the fact that it was from this country that the heaviest pressure to publish had come. For a rapid and extensive circulation of the volumes in the United States the ground had hardly been prepared. Here the previous productions of the poet had been practically inaccessible. There is still in existence a manuscript volume in the handwriting of James Russell Lowell which contains a number of Tennyson's early poems. These had been copied by him at the time and were circulated among a group of private friends.[1] To such shifts were the American admirers of the poet forced to resort. In consequence, there had been little opportunity for men to become acquainted with his writings; by vast numbers of the educated even his very name

[1] F. Greenslet's 'James Russell Lowell,' p. 42.

had hardly been heard. Furthermore, the piratical reprinting of British periodicals, brought about by the absence of international copyright, had noticeably destroyed here the spirit of independent criticism. Men were largely in a state of intellectual servitude. Accepting views at second hand which had not been worthy of being heeded at first hand, and retaining them after the originators had outgrown them, or had become ashamed of them, will account for most of the hostile criticism to which Tennyson was here subjected at the outset.

A somewhat hesitating attitude, to be sure, was occasionally taken which was not at all due to that cause. To a certain extent, both in England and America, the perfect finish of Tennyson's poetry has constantly militated against the loftiness of the estimate placed upon it. Men have always shown a disposition to become tired and at times resentful of anything approaching flawless achievement. It is a feeling which is never entirely absent from human nature, and has undoubtedly often expressed itself in action long before Aristides was ostracized by his irritated fellow citizen for being everywhere termed the Just. Something of a sentiment of the same general character has been, even from the beginning, more or less prevalent about Tennyson. With a particular class of readers there is a disposition to believe that poetry which possesses smoothness must on that very account be deficient in strength. It lacks strength because it lacks roughness. This is very much as if a great piece of architecture should be deemed wanting

in solidity and stability because it possesses throughout the beauty of grace and exquisite proportion.

Echoes of this sort of feeling were heard then and long afterward even from those honestly disposed to admire. Early in August, 1842, Charles Sumner wrote to Milnes of the appearance of the American edition. "'Tennyson's poems,' he said, "have been reprinted in Boston, and the reprint is a precise copy of the English edition in size, type, and paper, so that it is difficult to distinguish the two editions. It is reprinted for the benefit of the author, to whom the publisher hopes to remit some honorarium. Emerson and his followers are ardent admirers of Tennyson, and it is their enthusiastic, unhesitating praise that induced a bookseller to undertake the reprint. There are some things in the second volume which I admire very much. 'LocksleyHall' has some magnificent verses, and others hardly intelligible. 'Godiva' is unequalled as a narrative in verse, and the little stories of Lady Clare and the Lord of Burleigh are told in beautiful measure. I am struck with the melody of his verse, its silver ring, and its high poetic fancy; but does it not want elevated thought and manliness? And yet, in its way, what can be more exquisite than Œnone making Mount Ida echo with her complaints? Was her story ever told in a sweeter strain in any language?'"[1]

It is pretty hard for us at this late day to discover what any one could then have found unintelligible in 'Locksley Hall.' But the sentiments just quoted, little

[1] 'Life, Letters and Friendships of Richard Monckton Milnes,' Vol. I, p. 279.

as they would have satisfied Tennyson's ardent admirers in this country, doubtless represent fairly the view taken then by many cultivated men who came for the first time to the perusal of these poems. But here, in truth, possibly more than in England, did the disposition to underrate prevail in certain quarters. At all events, it had here the courage, which it lacked there, of expressing to the full its hostility. Consequently the old depreciatory remarks, forgotten or suppressed in England, continued to be repeated in America in certain quarters. Tennyson's career was strewn throughout with the absurdities of English criticism; and it is not fitting that those exhibited on this side of the Atlantic should escape commemoration. They lacked here even the slight merit of originality. Two utterances in particular, which then appeared, are worth citing because they show conclusively that the impression created by Lockhart's article was even at that late day still exerting its influence in this country.

A peculiarly choice specimen of this sort of pilfered severity can be found in 'The Southern Literary Messenger,' published at Richmond, Virginia. For the view expressed in it, its author cannot plead that hastiness of impression which results from the limitation of time which is afforded for forming an opinion. The criticism did not appear until April, 1844. Accordingly the writer had had the benefit of two years to make up his mind. He gained nothing by the delay. He did little more than repeat in an intensified form the opinions expressed in the 'Quarterly' of 1833, though at this date their very author

had been forced to repent of their publication if he had not gained the grace to feel ashamed of their character. The American reviewer rehashed all the old criticisms apparently under the belief that they were his own. He actually went back to Lockhart's article and quoted from it the lines to Christopher North; for the volume in which these had appeared he had manifestly never seen. "Mr. Tennyson," was his conclusion, "appears to be a man of slender intellect, who has inflamed his imagination by believing himself a poet, and has supplied its numerous vacuities by studying the works of others."

Fortunately for his repute the name of this gifted southern critic has either been forgotten or more probably has been studiously withheld from the knowledge of the public.[1] Unfortunately such good luck has not fallen to the lot of his northern rival. In the same quarterly, in which six years before a cordial welcome had been extended to Tennyson's early verse, appeared a review of the poems of 1842 altogether different in character.[2] It came too from an honored name. It was the work of Felton, professor of Greek at Harvard College. Felton was a scholar and a man of culture; but he was as little alive to the new influences that were beginning to dominate literature as was Croker on the other side of the Atlantic. He belonged to the

[1] "An anonymous reviewer of Tennyson's poems is not at all complimentary."—'The Southern Literary Messenger, 1834-1864,' by Benjamin Blake Minor, Editor and Proprietor from 1843 to 1847, 1905, p. 123. One gets the impression that the anonymous reviewer was the editor himself.

[2] 'Christian Examiner,' Vol. XXXIII, pp. 237-244, November, 1842.

old school of critics who accepted fully the belief that the poetry at this time coming into vogue—that of Keats and Tennyson—lacked the severe simplicity and classic spirit of the former age. Such persons had been somewhat discouraged by the defection of the 'Quarterly' in allowing a so-called favorable notice of Tennyson to appear in its columns. Its authority, however, was not sufficient to dispose them to bow down and worship at the shrine of the new deity which the men of the younger generation had set up.

Of these recalcitrants on this side of the Atlantic, Felton was one of the most conspicuous. His article indeed is of particular interest because it reveals how wide-reaching had been the influence of Lockhart's criticism, and how intense was still the prejudice against Tennyson which had been set in motion by the hostile treatment which had been accorded him in his own land. Here we find it manifesting its old character and vigor in what must be called not the most abusive but distinctly the silliest criticism which the poet's new venture received anywhere. 'The Quarterly Review' might yield to the change which had been going on in public sentiment and retract its previous censures. Not so its faithful followers in this country. Fate has been kind to many critics during their lives in hiding behind a bulwark of type all public knowledge of the authorship of their productions. It has been even kinder in death, when not merely is their memory forgotten but the memory of what they wrote. Hard, therefore, has been the fortune of this particular reviewer, who could so little forecast

the future that, disdaining the shelter of anonymousness, he signed his initials to his article. Few are the men who would like to go down to posterity with their names attached to the criticism now to be considered. A curiosity it assuredly is both for the ridiculousness of the opinions which it expressed and for the ridiculousness of the facts which it stated. It is in the following way that Felton paid his respects to the new poet.

"Mr. Tennyson's poetical fortunes," began the review, "have been singularly various. Some six or seven years ago he first became known, partly by his own extraordinary demerits, and chiefly by a stringent review in the London Quarterly. It was supposed that he was, poetically speaking, dead; he certainly was, theatrically speaking, though not theologically, damned. Strange to say, his poems found their way across the Atlantic, and gained favor in the eyes of a peculiar class of sentimentalists. Young ladies were known to copy them entire, and learn them by heart. Stanzas of most melodious unmeaningness passed from mouth to mouth, and were praised to the very echo. The man who possessed a copy was the envy of more than twenty persons, counting women and children; until at length Mr. Tennyson came into possession of a very considerable amount of reputation. His ardent admirers sent to England for copies; but singularly enough, not one was to be had. The poet had bought them all up and committed them to the flames; but moved by the transatlantic resurrection of his poetical character, he set about convincing

people that he was alive too at home. He broke upon the world in the twofold splendor of a pair of volumes, published in Mr. Moxon's finest style. His former writings were clipped of many puerilities, and brought nearer the confines of common sense; to them were added many poems never before printed, some of which are marked by a delicate frost-work kind of beauty. The London Quarterly Journalists came out immediately with a long and highly laudatory critique, and ranked Mr. Tennyson among the foremost poets of the age, without an allusion to the homicidal attack they had made on him only a few short years before; and without the least apology for surrendering the infallibility of reviewers."

Whether it was owing to inaccuracy of information or to sportiveness of spirit manifesting itself in a somewhat elephantine way, it is clear that several of the statements made in the foregoing paragraph are not to be recommended for their rigid conformity to fact. But these were left far behind by the critical estimate and imaginary personal portrayal, honestly intended to be facetious, which followed. Along with his severity ran Felton's stern determination to be jocose at all hazards. He did not deny the poet the possession of some genius. There was even an affectation of candor in his remark that Tennyson looked "on things with a poetical eye"—which is something more than could be said for his critic. But he modified even this praise by adding that the things he looks on are "small things, and his eye is none of the largest. . . . He has a remarkable alacrity at sinking."

Further we were told that while he was "a dainty poet," he was deficient in manly thought and strong expression. "He is," said the critic, "a curious compound of the poet, the dandy, and the Della Cruscan." As was to be expected, affectation was declared to be his prevailing intellectual vice. The critic added a playful mental picture of the bodily presence of the man, the verisimilitude of which must have much impressed those who were aware of the poet's carelessness in dress. "We cannot help fancying him," said Felton, "to be altogether finical in his personal habits. He is a sweet gentleman and delights to gaze upon his image in a glass; his hair is probably long, and carefully curled; he writes in white kid gloves, on scented paper; perhaps he sleeps in yellow curl-papers. We are certain he lisps." But with all this distressing facetiousness, the critic was not altogether unfair. It may be maintained indeed that he undesignedly made much more than amends for what he said by what he did. As a sort of offset to a review intended to be mildly satirical and wholly humorous, he printed the whole of 'Locksley Hall.' It is not often that a critic of poetry is willing to disclose to the intelligent reader so manifest an exhibition of his own critical incapacity.

There were other unfavorable notices in American periodicals, but none quite so hopelessly inane as the two which have just been cited. It must not be fancied, however, that these reflected the prevailing tone of criticism. Even hostile as these were, they admitted the fact that the poems had met with success. The

writer in the northern periodical bore reluctant witness to their popularity, especially to their popularity with those who lacked the austere taste and intellectual virility of the critic, and his disdain for the meretricious charms with which the poet had bedecked his muse. The reviewer in 'The Southern Literary Messenger' felt obliged to concede the fact that they had been received favorably. "They have been republished here," he said, "and we are informed that they have met with a ready and extensive sale." For in America as in England, the poems found readers who had been brought up on more nourishing intellectual diet than old 'Quarterly Reviews.' As time went on, even Felton, while retaining his hostility, felt that he must concede to the poet genius of a certain sort as well as the popularity which he deplored. In 'The North American Review' for April, 1844, there was a criticism by him of the poems of Lowell.[1] In the course of it he spoke of the feeble and flat imitations of Mrs. Hemans which had appeared. "And now," he continued, "feebler and flatter imitations of Alfred Tennyson wear out the forbearance of a long-suffering public." He found the same fault with the American poet that 'The Quarterly Review' had previously found with Milnes. He warned him against the tendency to imitate Tennyson. He discovered in him "a disposition to mimic the jingle of a man who, with much genius, and an exquisite ear for musical rhythm, has also a Titanian fondness for quaint and

1 Vol. LVIII, p. 286.

dainty expressions, affected turns, and mawkishly effeminate sentiment.''

To Felton indeed and to men like him in control of 'The North American Review,' there continued to be a persistent ignoring of the work of Tennyson which was not in the least due to ignorance. For a long series of years, he was the one English poet whom that periodical sedulously refrained from noticing. Though time and space were given up to elaborate criticisms of English writers of far inferior grade, no review of Tennyson appeared for many years in its columns. Incidental references only are to be found. Naturally there was nothing said about the volumes of 1842. But likewise there was nothing said of 'The Princess,' of 'In Memoriam,' of the 'Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington.' It was not until 1855 when his reputation had swept away all unfavorable criticism of the slightest significance, that a single article on his works was allowed to appear. It was a review of 'Maud.' It was not very long, nor as a piece of criticism was it broad. Still, feeble as it was, it was intended to be complimentary. But by that time it had become a matter of indifference to readers whether any notice of his poetry appeared in 'The North American Review' or not. Every one had then made up his mind—that is, every one who had a mind to make up—and cared little what any critic said either for or against the poet. It is, however, justice to add that in the periodical in question various incidental references to Tennyson appeared during the interval. Some of them too were highly laudatory; for contribu-

tors to the review had sense, even if its conductors did not.

There was doubtless a certain amount of truth in the satirical references made by Felton to the class of persons who had welcomed with special enthusiasm Tennyson's earlier volumes. The pressure from America to publish had come to no small extent from the group of disciples who had gathered about Emerson. It was far from being confined to them, but in them it found its noisiest manifestation. They belonged to the so-called Transcendental School which in 1841 had established as a sort of official organ the quarterly periodical called 'The Dial.' Of this publication Margaret Fuller was the original editor. Testimony to the admiration felt for Tennyson by the members of this band is met with frequently. A belated notice of his two early volumes appeared in 'The Dial' for July, 1841.[1] It pretty certainly came from the pen of its editor. "Tennyson is known by heart," said the writer, "is copied as Greek works were at the revival of literature; nothing has been known for ten years back more the darling of the young than these two little volumes."

Accordingly it was inevitable that the members of the circle which surrounded Emerson—who, though an admirer of the poet, was far from being as enthusiastic a one as his followers—it was inevitable that they should hail with intense gratification the prospect of the publication of additional poems by their favorite. The forthcoming work was duly announced in 'The

[1] Vol. II, p. 135.

Dial' for July, 1842.[1] "Alfred Tennyson," it said, "moved by being informed of his American popularity, has given himself to the labor of revising and reprinting a selection of his old poems, and adding as many new ones, which he has sent to Mr. Wheeler of Harvard University, who is republishing them here." It is evidence of the distance of time as well as of space which then separated the two continents that the work, which Tennyson is here described as preparing for the press, had already been before the English people for several weeks. By the group of persons already indicated, the volumes when they came out in this country were received with intense enthusiasm. A most cordial review of them appeared in 'The Dial' for October of the same year, which by its fervor contrasts sharply with the staid tone of the English quarterlies. This again was probably the work of Margaret Fuller. It certainly corresponds in spirit to the words in her journal of August, 1842, in which she records her impression of the work which had just appeared in America. "I have just been reading," it said, "the new poems of Tennyson. Much has he thought, much suffered, since the first ecstasy of so fine an organization clothed all the world with rosy light. He has not suffered himself to become a mere intellectual voluptuary, nor the songster of fancy and passion, but has earnestly revolved the problems of life, and his conclusions are calmly noble. In these later verses is a still, deep sweetness; how different from the intoxicating sensuous melody of his earlier

[1] Vol. III, p. 135.

cadence.'' In the article itself there was little limit to the praise bestowed. Approbation indeed was given to poems for which few have been found to say a good word. ''Nothing is more uncommon,'' said, for instance, the writer, ''than the lightness of touch, which gives a charm to such little pieces as the 'Skipping Rope.' '' It ought to be more than uncommon; it should be impossible.

But the article represented fairly, in general, the attitude of the early American admirers of the poet who had been instrumental in urging upon him the necessity of appearing once more in print. It was of course far from being universal. In the various critical utterances in this country, as well as in England, there was at times displayed ignorance; there was indifference; there was to a certain extent hostility. Depreciatory opinions came occasionally from quarters where we should least have expected it. Even in 'The Dial'[1] itself, as at about the same time in 'The Cambridge University Magazine,' appeared reviews of Tennyson's poems which did not err on the side of undue praise. The writer in the former periodical objected to him as being too superfine, as lacking what he called rude truth—whatever he meant by the phrase. ''We must not make our bread of pure sugar,'' he remarked. ''The poem,'' he added, ''of all the poetry

1 It has been a very common statement that it was Emerson's admiration of the poems that caused their publication in America. But it was not so much the admiration of Emerson as that of his followers. When Margaret Fuller ceased to edit 'The Dial,' its tone immediately changed. Under Emerson's editorship no one could accuse it of extravagant praise of Tennyson. In it appeared some of those extraordinary literary judgments which eminence indulges in for the comfort of its inferiors.

of the present age, for which we predict the longest term, is 'Abou ben Adhem' of Leigh Hunt.'"[1] In the English periodical the writer repeated the old formulas, criticised the poet for his quaintnesses of spelling and expression, and in particular for his doggerel. Of this last 'Will Waterproof's Lyrical Monologue' was cited as a peculiarly objectionable specimen. These expressions of opinion need no comment; for of themselves they indicate unmistakably the literary status of the critics. It will probably occasion no surprise to learn that both the periodicals in which they appeared speedily died.

But articles like these were after all mere eddies in the general stream of approbation. There was a great deal of genuine appreciation early manifested in this country which had not been fed on previous knowledge, although it was not till the following decade that it had had time to become practically universal. Not to speak of various anonymous printed utterances, a cordial tribute was paid the poet in 1845 by Edwin Percy Whipple, who at that period held, especially in New England, high repute as one of the country's most eminent critics. This is a sort of reputation, which, whether deserved or undeserved, is of the most transitory nature. Rufus Wilmot Griswold, an industrious but not illuminating compiler, had brought out a volume entitled 'The Poets and Poetry of England in the Nineteenth Century.' In it he assured us with delightful gravity that the writings of Alfred Tennyson have sufficient merit to place him "in the third

[1] April, 1843, Vol. III, pp. 517-518.

or fourth rank of contemporary English poets." With this solemn pronouncement Whipple naturally made himself merry in his review of the second edition of the work which appeared in 1844. To outspoken praise of the poet he devoted several pages.[1]

But no published criticism at this early date, either in America or any other country, rivalled that of Poe in the estimate placed upon Tennyson's achievement. It found expression again and again. It must be borne in mind that Poe died in 1849. This was before a great deal of the work by which Tennyson is now largely known was in existence, or at least had come to the knowledge of men. Accordingly, he was familiar only with his comparatively early verse, which still continued to be disparaged by many. But Poe, who never lacked the courage of his convictions, had no hesitation in proclaiming the superiority of Tennyson to all the poets of his generation. His criticism of other authors varied widely at times—at least it seemed to vary—as to the nature and extent of their merits or demerits. But in regard to Tennyson he never wavered; though he would persist—or at least his publishers did—in printing 'Œnone' as 'Ænone.' His conclusions were based largely upon the poems found in the edition of 1842. As early as August, 1843, he had expressed his admiration. It went far beyond what most admirers were then willing to go, or at least were permitted to go in their published utterance. "For Tennyson," he wrote, "as for a man imbued with the richest and rarest poetic impulses, we have an

1 'The American Review, A Whig Journal,' Vol. II, p. 45.

admiration—a reverence unbounded. His 'Morte d'Arthur,' his 'Locksley Hall,' his 'Sleeping Beauty,' his 'Lady of Shalott,' his 'Lotos-Eaters,' his 'Ænone,' and many other poems, are not surpassed in all that gives to Poetry its distinctive value, by the compositions of any one living or dead.''[1] A little more than a year after, he went much farther than any one else had ever gone, at least in print. He was not content with merely putting him at the head of contemporary writers. ''I am not sure,'' he wrote, ''that Tennyson is not the greatest of poets. The uncertainty attending the public conception of the term 'poet' alone prevents me from demonstrating that he *is*. Other bards produce effects which are, now and then, otherwise produced than by what we call poems; but Tennyson an effect which only a poem does. His alone are idiosyncratic poems. By the enjoyment or non-enjoyment of the 'Morte d'Arthur,' or of 'Ænone,' I would test any one's ideal sense.''[2] Nor did the attitude here indicated ever change. His last recorded utterance about Tennyson was not printed till after his own death. In the essay entitled 'The Poetic Principle,' in citing from 'The Princess' the four stanzas beginning ''Tears, idle tears,'' he asserted of their author that ''in perfect sincerity I regard him as the noblest poet that ever lived.''[3]

Still it is manifest from the evidence that has been presented that the appreciation, great as it was, which

[1] 'Our Amateur Poets,' No. 3, 'Graham's Magazine,' August, 1843.
[2] 'Democratic Review,' December, 1844, Vol. XV, p. 580.
[3] 'Sartain's Union Magazine,' October, 1850, Vol. VI, p. 238.

at that early time waited upon Tennyson, had as yet neither in England nor America become universal. Little of the enthusiasm which prevailed among the most cultivated class of readers, especially among the younger members of that body, found expressions in the organs which professed to represent and guide public opinion. The only review of that period which gave full and unreserved utterance to the sentiment which was ultimately to prevail can be found in 'Tait's Edinburgh Magazine' of August, 1842. But another voice from that same region was silent. It was a voice, too, which under ordinary conditions might well have been expected to be the very first to greet the man who had so unexpectedly to most exhibited his poetical supremacy. Yet from it no welcome was heard. Of the new work which cultivated readers all over the land were talking about, no notice was taken by the then renowned critic of 'Blackwood's Magazine.' In its conduct his influence still remained predominant. Not for some years after the publication of the volumes of 1842 was the name of Tennyson so much as mentioned in the columns of that periodical. But more than simple omission had characterized the critic's course; there had been aggressive action. At the time itself the poet indeed was not assailed by name; but he was so by implication. The appearance of another work was seized upon as the occasion to minimize or rather to depreciate his achievement. No notice has ever been taken of these attacks upon Tennyson either by his biographers or by students of the literary history of the times. But the attitude assumed towards

the first poet of the age in the early years of his career by him who was generally rated as the first critic of the age is a matter of sufficient importance to demand full recital. It assuredly forms a distinctly curious story in the history of criticism; and as it has never been told, to its narration the following chapter shall be devoted.

CHAPTER XVIII

CHRISTOPHER NORTH'S LATER ATTACKS ON TENNYSON

In spite of its bluster and rowdyism and occasional mad antics of all sorts, 'Blackwood's Magazine' for the quarter of a century following its foundation in 1817 was one of the best-conducted of British literary periodicals. Furthermore it was on the whole one of the fairest. That, too, it was in spite of its virulent Toryism and frequent lapses into the most reprehensible outbursts of abuse. Its editor is now known to have been its publisher. By the great body of its readers, however, John Wilson—better known by his pseudonym of Christopher North—was credited with holding that place. He was so called indeed by Lockhart. The belief was to this extent true in that he was the great mainstay of the magazine. Without his help it certainly could never have kept the position it speedily secured, even if it could have reached it at all.

Wilson's criticism of the Tennyson volume of 1830 was, as we have seen, followed by the petulant and foolish lines addressed to Christopher North in the volume of 1832. These were unworthy both in their matter and in their spirit. In spite of the swaggering tone of the article, its patronizing airs, its denunciation

of particular pieces, and that general assumption of superiority which is part of the stock in trade of the reviewer, the impression given by it as a whole was distinctly favorable. Wilson indeed had a right to feel indignant at the way, both petty and pettish, in which his criticism had been taken by its subject. He however took no notice—at least no public notice—at the time of the attack upon himself. What he might have said was said vicariously through Lockhart's article in the 'Quarterly.' He kept silence indeed for several years, so far certainly as any published utterances in his own magazine were concerned. Nor was there in that periodical any exhibition of hostility to Tennyson. On the contrary, it contained a few of what might have been deemed then fairly flattering references to his work, however inadequate they may seem now. In a highly laudatory review of Trench's 'Story of Justin Martyr' praise was given to the sonnets of Tennyson.[1] These, to be sure, were the poems of his least deserving of commendation. Nor would the junction of his name with the other writers mentioned—Leigh Hunt, David Moir, Barry Cornwall, and John Clare—impress men of the present day as conveying much of a compliment. Still, it is always unfair to judge of the criticism of the past by the estimation of the present. Every great writer attains in time to a certain wealth of reputation, not indeed an unearned increment, but an amount of compound interest which has been accruing since the investment was first made.

But though he said nothing for a time, Wilson's

[1] 'Blackwood's Magazine,' September, 1835, Vol. XXXVIII, p. 425.

resentment for the attack made upon him never slumbered. We hear often of the irritability and sensitiveness of authors. There are assuredly among them individuals easily affected by hostile criticism; but as a body they are no more sensitive than any other class of men. Similar displays of feeling occur on every side and by the members of every profession; but the knowledge of these never reaches the ears of any beyond the circle of their immediate personal acquaintance. But the resentment of authors is not merely vocal; it is also permanent. It is fairly sure to be printed and widely circulated. If they have achieved popularity, it is talked about everywhere. So long as their works continue to be read, it is never forgotten, while the resentment of the critic, no matter how eminent in his day, is little likely to be known to posterity, for the knowledge of it never reaches posterity. The cases are very exceptional when critical literature interests and influences any one but contemporaries. Rarely indeed is it even heard of save by contemporaries. Consequently, as in the case of other men, with the passing away of the life of the reviewer passes away all memory of the resentment he may have displayed.

If, however, sensitiveness to disparagement of their work can be predicated of authors as a body, it is the most marked in the case of those of them who are specially critics by profession. Accustomed to attack others with little restraint, they become furious at any attack upon themselves. There has already been occasion to record the excitement and wrath displayed

in this particular on one occasion by both Lockhart and Wilson. It is with the latter only that we have to deal here. Never was susceptibility to a petty personal quip more signally exhibited than it was by him in his later attitude towards the poet. Great as had been the sensitiveness shown by Tennyson to Wilson's review, it was more than equalled, it was far surpassed by the sensitiveness of Wilson to Tennyson's retort. The latter had had the grace to become ashamed of his outburst almost as soon as he found it too late to have it recalled. But his apologetic letter did not placate the critic. Wilson brooded over it. As time went on, it loomed up more and more distinctly in his thoughts. Some years indeed passed before he gave expression to his resentment, at least public expression. It seems likely that at first he fancied Tennyson's career would be too inconspicuous for him to add anything to the assumed crushing attack which had come from the 'Quarterly.' But as years went by, the poet's reputation, though increasing slowly, was still increasing. The faith in him of his original friends and admirers, so far from wavering, was steadily becoming more intensified. But, furthermore, it was beginning to be shared by those who had with Tennyson no ties of personal acquaintance. This slow but steady advance in the estimation of the public began at last to attract the attention of Wilson. More and more he noted it, more and more he took it amiss. He became embittered enough at last to assume the offensive.

Foolish as had been Tennyson's manifestation of

resentment at Wilson's article, the critic was now to show himself far more censurable in the matter of what he said, in the spirit with which he said it, and in the addition of reprehensible conduct for what he pretended he had said but what he had failed to say. Nor did the attacks he soon came to make have the excuse of momentary irritation. On the contrary, they followed years after the offence had been originally committed; they were continued as long as he dared to oppose his own view of the poet to that of the public. Though no notice has ever been taken of these utterances, though all knowledge of them seems to have died from the memory of men, they present a curious picture of the importance which the editors of the leading critical periodicals then attributed to their own opinions, and the sanctity they assumed for themselves.

In this matter one sees the reason why Jeffrey gained the hold he did upon his generation. Whatever were his other critical shortcomings, he cherished no resentment for attacks upon himself, when he came to express a literary judgment. Take his attitude upon the publication of the first two cantos of 'Childe Harold.' This came out at a time when a verdict of 'The Edinburgh Review' usually carried life or death for the time being to the work it criticised. Jeffrey had been fiercely attacked by Byron in his 'English Bards and Scotch Reviewers.' In a note to his new venture the poet gave further expression to the feelings of enmity which he still cherished against the periodical and its editor. But none of these things

affected in the slightest the estimate which Jeffrey gave of the new work. At the close of his article he made merely the slightest of references to the hostility of Byron towards himself personally. "For our own parts," he concluded, "when we speak in our collective and public capacity, we have neither resentments nor predilections; and take no merit to ourselves for having spoken of Lord Byron's present publication exactly as we should have done, had we never heard of him before as an author." Men may take exception to Jeffrey's critical views; but fault can rarely be found with his critical attitude. In that it is easy to see one great reason why he so powerfully impressed his contemporaries as a literary judge.

Not so with Wilson. He never forgot or forgave. The resentment he cherished for Tennyson's contemptuous refusal of any praise he had bestowed continued to rankle in his bosom, though it was not until nearly four years after the publication of the volume of 1832 that it made first public manifestation of itself. This occurred in a review of the 'Miscellaneous Plays' of Joanna Baillie. That authoress had in 1836 broken the silence of several years by bringing out three volumes of dramatic pieces. They received the usual laudatory notice from the regular critics and were received with the usual indifference by the public. The fortunes of that playwright, it may be said here, were peculiar. Rarely has any one been more praised by those whose praise was worth having. From the time of her first appearance as a dramatic writer in 1798 until the publication just mentioned, the most

authoritative reviewers expressed unqualified commendation of her work. By minor critics she had been attacked; but of the great ones Jeffrey seems to have been the only one who managed to retain his judgment along with his admiration. By Scott she was called the bold enchantress who had awakened the inspired strain of Shakespeare.

The practice of so celebrating her began early and continued late. Her plays were extolled as exhibiting the development of the pure dramatic faculty with the least possible aid from external influences. Her lyrics, which were but ordinary productions, were spoken of in terms of extravagant eulogy. But while her plays were warmly praised by critics, they met with comparatively little success upon the stage. Yet powerful influences were several times at work to make them succeed. In 1800 the Kembles brought out 'De Montfort' at Drury Lane. The aristocracy lent the production its fullest support. Members of it wrote prologue and epilogue. More than anything else, the principal female part was taken by Mrs. Siddons. Yet with all these aids, direct and adventitious, it was with difficulty the play was made to run eleven nights. In spite of occasional successes, this experience represents in general the fortune which befell the representation of her pieces. They were unfitted for the stage, it was said, in consequence of the theory of composition she had adopted. Her whole object in each one was to represent the development of a single passion. While this method might be good for the closet, it practically debarred the use of stage effect. Unfor-

tunately for this explanation, these plays succeeded no better with the reading public than they did with the frequenters of the theater. Her works had a respectable sale; but they were never popular then and certainly have had time since to be largely forgotten.

Wilson's review of these volumes appeared in 1836 in the January and February numbers of 'Blackwood.' It repeated the same eulogies of the excellence of these dramas which had been current among the critics of Joanna Baillie from the beginning of the century. He felt that Scott had been justified in linking her name with that of Shakespeare. He contrasted the superiority of her work with the inferiority of what was then being produced. He gave vent to his usual lamentation about the decay of poetry which had followed the passing away of the great authors of the Georgian era. "Where are the young poets?" he said with a sigh—at least he said he sighed. Dim in his eyes and somewhat small were the few luminaries that were then in ascension. Poetical ability, it was true, was not then entirely lacking; but it was not poetical ability of a high grade. On the strength of these introductory remarks, he went out of his way in his second article to rebuke the folly of the little band of admirers whose belief in the greatness of Tennyson was at last beginning to make itself distinctly felt. Though it could in no sense be said to extend and increase perceptibly the sale of his works, it was sufficient to arouse the hostility of those who denied his claims. It affected Wilson notably. It might

almost be said indeed that the second of these articles appears to have been written about as much for the disparagement of Tennyson as it was for the glorification of Joanna Baillie and incidentally of himself.

"Not but that there is poetical genius," wrote Wilson, "among our young aspirants—the Tennysons, the Trenches, the Alfords, and others, whom we have delighted to praise; and whom we should rejoice to see shining as fixed stars of the first magnitude in the poetical firmament. Fixed stars of the first magnitude! Why, it was debated in a spouting society at Cambridge—'Is Alfred Tennyson a GREAT POET'! Shakespeare, Homer, Milton, and Wordsworth are Great Poets; and it might have been thought that the mere mention of such names would have silenced the most flatulent of all the praters. The 'bare imagination' of such a debate must bring the blush of shame on the face of every man of common sense; and Mr. Tennyson himself must have wept with vexation at the ineffable folly of his friends who maintained the affirmative. Let him lay to heart the kind counsels of Christopher North, who alone has done justice to his fine faculties, and the laurel crown will erelong be placed on his head. He has yet written but some beautiful verses—a few very charming compositions, that are in truth little poems—not great ones—his feeling is exquisite, and so is his fancy—but oh! how feeble too often his Thought! Feeble because he is a wilful fribble—flattery has made him so—but would he but scorn his sycophants, his strength

would be restored, and nature would be glad to see him, what she designed him to be, a *true* poet."

This quotation is noteworthy for the grudging recognition it gave of the ability of the man it perfunctorily praised. Wilson could not deny Tennyson's genius as a poet. He was too thoroughly sensitive to intellectual beauty to commit so gross an absurdity as that, even with the resentment he continued to cherish at the provocation he had received. Still his words plainly imply also that he was disposed to regard him as a poet of inferior rank, and that such he would always remain. His place was among the "true" poets, not among the great ones. Wilson honestly believed that he was doing Tennyson sufficient honor by putting him in the same class with Alford, with Trench, and several others whom he included under the general name of the Young Poets. In a certain way and to a certain extent, he approved of all of them; but that any one of their number had furnished evidence of being a great poet, even any greater poet than himself for example, had probably never occurred to him as conceivable. He has left us no doubt of his feelings on this point; a little later in this same article he made his state of mind evident. "To speak the plain truth at once," he went on to say, "not one of our young poets—and some of them are full fledged—has taken a single sustained flight higher than the cock on the spire of a village church. Not one of them has written a poem that has taken possession of the nation's heart. Each bardling has his admirers, who commit bits of him to a treacherous

or tenacious memory—but when they quote a response of their oracle, it falls dead on the ears of the groundlings—and all are groundlings, in their estimation, who will not fall down and worship such 'despicable gods.' "

Though this language was general, there was but one specific application of it possible. There was no person whom the critic could have had in mind but Tennyson. No one but he of these younger poets could boast of a body of professed admirers. In censuring them for the zeal they displayed, Wilson might well have remembered his own position a quarter of a century before. At that time he was himself one of a very small band who celebrated to an indifferent or contemptuous world the greatness of Wordsworth. What he now said of Tennyson would have been then true of the writer who had aroused his own early enthusiasm. No poem of Wordsworth at the period Wilson began to chant his praises had taken possession of the nation's heart. The lines which that poet's admirers then committed to memory fell dead upon the ears of the groundlings, or were more frequently made the subject of derision. He had lived to see this all changed. He had lived to find Wordsworth's finest pieces not merely cherished by multitudes of readers, but unqualified praise bestowed upon his prosiest performances.

Still later in this same article Wilson unconsciously revealed how heavily Tennyson lay on his mind and how much he continued to be irritated by the admiration entertained and expressed for the poet by the

men of Cambridge. It occurs in the midst of the laudations with which the writers in 'Blackwood' were everlastingly bedaubing themselves and the assumption they persistently maintained that the reputation of authors was not so much the result of their own personal achievement as of the way in which they were spoken of in this periodical. Wilson discoursed about the Young Poets and what he individually had done for them. "Were it not for Us," he wrote, "where would they be? Nowhere. Out of Cambridge and Cockneydom, how many scores of Christian creatures have ever seen either of Alfred Tennyson's Volumes? Not fourscore. In Maga many of his best compositions have been perused with delight by tens of thousands—and as sympathy is what every poet most fervently desires, how deep ought to be—and how deep must be—his gratitude to Christopher North! 'Fit audience find though few' was a sentiment all very well at the time—for the Poet of Paradise Lost. But a young lyrical poet of the present day cannot, do what he will, be satisfied with the applauses of a coterie of under-graduates, though graced with the countenance of the Wooden Spoon of the year, shining in the gloss of novelty almost like a horn. He longs for a 'waking empire wide as dreams,' and he finds it in the most beneficent of perennials whose smile is fame, and whose praise is immortality."

For the sake of glorifying himself Wilson in these remarks had taken the pains not to worry about exactness of statement. There are those who would call it deliberate misrepresentation. The clientele of

Tennyson was assuredly at that time small; but it was altogether larger and wider than the critic gave the impression of its being. It was made up, too, of men who besides being of superior ability, were coming to have that superiority widely recognized. Such persons were not in the habit of going to any periodical whatever in order to have their opinions formed or formulated. Their very independence contributed to the growth of their influence. A much more reprehensible parsimony in the use of truth was perceptible in the assertion that the readers of 'Blackwood's Magazine' had seen the poet's best compositions. The only criticism found in it had been of the volume of 1830. Not the slightest notice had been taken of the much superior work found in the volume of 1832. So far from a single poem it contained having been quoted there, not even so much as an allusion had ever been made to the volume at all or to anything of merit appearing in it. But the passages are interesting as showing how keenly the man who was so ready to criticise others felt any blow that was aimed at himself in return. It is evident also that he had an uneasy consciousness that Tennyson, however unwilling his critic was to concede him greatness, was in possession of powers outside of his own capacity of expression.

This latter state of mind was more than indicated, it was openly confessed in a review which appeared a few months later of a work of Alford's, entitled 'The School of the Heart.' It is noteworthy that in this review, while Wilson affected to rank Tennyson among the other Cambridge poets who were his

contemporaries, his critical sense was too keen to allow him to perpetrate a blunder of that kind unqualifiedly. He recognized and admitted that the work of this particular author was essentially different from that of the rest, though it might be hard to tell whether in his opinion it was a difference for the better or the worse. He declared that in reading the new poems that were coming out he felt as if they had been written by himself. They reflected dimly or clearly his own emotions. "This may be the secret cause," he wrote, "of the delight which we derive from almost every publication, whether in prose or verse, called new by the public, and fondly believed to be so by the nominal author. It is a mirror dimly or clearly reflecting ourselves. There have been some exceptions—and among them perhaps the most conspicuous were the Poems, chiefly Lyrical, by Alfred Tennyson. They contained numerous beauties which we feel to be original and out of our sphere; and on our expressing our delighted admiration of them, we gave vent to the most unselfish and disinterested feelings that could expand a critic's breast. Their follies were so peculiarly his own, that in printing them, almost without comment, we left them to speak for themselves, and they did so to the general scorn."[1]

The reader may well hesitate in accepting without qualification the assertion that a criticism of particular pieces which designates them as "drivel," "miserable drivel," "more dismal drivel," "distinguished silliness," and similar summary expressions of opinion

[1] 'Blackwood's Magazine,' May, 1836, Vol. XXXIX, p. 578.

can have a just title to be regarded as printing them almost without comment. This was true as regards space, but can hardly plead for itself ambiguity of condemnation. Wilson's further and final statement serves as an introduction to the unconscious revelation which he was now to make of how much he had been stung by the lines which had been addressed to Christopher North in the volume of 1832. Years had gone by since their appearance. Had he been really indifferent to them, they would have been forgotten. Had he received the poet's apology for them in the spirit in which it was sent, they would have been forgiven. But he was now to show that the bite of the midget, as he now styled it, which he characterized as impotent, had been singularly effective and painful. It is possible indeed that his feelings may have been further irritated by allusions to it by his enemies; though, so far as I am aware, no evidence exists of any such fact.

After glorifying as we have seen, the nobility and impartiality of the course he had followed in reference to the poet, Wilson entered into the particulars of his own grievance. "For conduct so judicious and benign," he wrote, "Mr. Tennyson commissioned a midge to madden and murder us with its fatal sting. A billion midges attacking the face and hands of one old man on a summer twilight might annoy him sorely, and drive him from his avenue into his house. But one midge, the first and last of his race, could not rationally expect to send Christopher North to Hades. . . . We survived the onslaught of the unhappy

little insect, who impotently expired 'even in the sound himself had made,' to afflict, on the earliest opportunity, the ingenious lyrist with our intolerable panegyrics. We are not without hopes of driving him absolutely mad; for his genius is unquestionable, and no comfort he may derive from our ridicule will suffice to make his life endurable under the opprobrium of our praise. True that Wordsworth, Scott, Coleridge, Southey, Campbell, Crabbe, Byron, Moore, Bowles, Montgomery, and Elliott have received kindly what Alfred Tennyson 'with sputtering noise rejected'; but they are gluttons, he an Epicure:

> He on honey dew hath fed,
> And breathed the air of Paradise."

Never under an affectation of jovial indifference did a critic betray keener sensitiveness. The wound inflicted by the bite of the midget had manifestly begun to fester. After years had passed, Wilson continued to pay an attention to the little squib directed against himself which it had not deserved at the time of its appearance when it was fresh in memory. Yet his perspicacity did not fail him. Inflamed as were his feelings, he fully recognized that Tennyson was a writer of a new school. He was, as he admitted, out of his own sphere. His language may have been ironical; but whether the words expressed his genuine sentiments or not—and they pretty surely did express them—there can be no question that unwittingly or wittingly he had spoken the truth. The poetry of Alford or of Trench which he had reviewed favorably

was not essentially different in character from the elegant but somewhat vapid verse which he himself had written. But in making a critical estimate of Tennyson he was dealing not only with a new writer but with a new force. Him it was not in his power to appreciate fully. He could venture to assume that he himself could have written the productions of the other bards whom he had mentioned with praise; but it hardly needed his own disclaimer that he never could have fancied himself the author of 'Poems, chiefly Lyrical.' The real difficulty with Tennyson in Wilson's eyes was that he not only had more genius than it was quite proper to possess, but it was genius of a different kind from that which his critic was disposed to approve.

Wilson had said that in spite of the lines addressed to Christopher North he had continued to afflict Tennyson with his panegyrics. If so, he must have confined them to his conversation: he has been careful not to put them in print. Nor furthermore did he content himself with casting ridicule upon the claims made for Tennyson by his partisans. He proceeded to set up a rival of his own. There is something extraordinary in the fatuousness he displayed, when we bear in mind that, when he was acting untrammelled and unprejudiced, his literary appreciation was keen and his literary discernment was usually trustworthy. About this time he fancied that he had discovered a new poet—a poet altogether superior to any of those of the modern generation, whom he was now learning

to term disdainfully the Young Poets. The opinion of his merits was contained in the leading article of 'Blackwood's Magazine' for November, 1837.[1] It was entitled 'Poetry by Our New Contributor.' Him he lauded in the highest terms; from him he quoted several pieces. According to the critic, one of them which was on a French subject surpassed everything found in the recently published 'French Revolution' of Carlyle, whose name somewhat strangely he spelled Carlisle. But it was not till the number for May of the following year that he pronounced definitely the superiority of this new contributor to all his contemporaries. This critical estimate was given in an article entitled 'Our Two Vases.'

In this article he gathered together the poetical pieces sent which he specially approved. With them was conjoined a running comment of his own. "Who are the best," he wrote, "of our rising or risen Poets, since the burst-out of Byron? We leave the older Heroes by themselves—living or dead—from Wordsworth to Hunt. Moir, Motherwell, Tennyson, Alford, Trench—any more? Knowles, Beddoes, Taylor, Talfourd, Bulwer, are Dramatists—and though as unlike to one another as may well be, belong to another Class—and must be treated accordingly, should we ever find ourselves in a promising mood for such a Series. But of the Poets aforesaid, think ye the very best—whoever he may be—could have written the following stanzas—by Archæus? Could he—and if he

[1] Vol. XLII, pp. 573-598.

can—*will* he write something as good? We opine 'tis a solemn strain worthy of one of the laurel-crowned

Serene Creators of immortal things."[1]

After this glowing introduction followed a poem entitled 'Lady Jane Grey.' It was a very good piece of work of the highly superior prize-poem order. This was the production of the much-vaunted new contributor who wrote under the signature of Archæus.

In the magazine of the following month this poem was followed by another from the same author called 'Aphrodite.' With it Wilson was more than delighted. He placed but little restraint upon the expression of his praise. This, he said, "places Archæus among the POETS OF ENGLAND."[2] The elevation to which the critic had raised him was indicated by printing the last three words in small caps. Who, it may be asked, was this new contributor, before whom Tennyson, of whom Wilson knew too much, and Browning, of whom he apparently knew nothing at all, were to fade into insignificance? He was an author whose memory has been mainly preserved, so far as it has been preserved, by what others have written about him, not by anything he wrote himself. It was John Sterling. The praise of Wilson was grateful at the time to the man whom death had already marked for his own; but it never lifted him into any public recognition even then and it has assuredly not done so since. To speak of

[1] Vol. XLIII, p. 698.
[2] June, 1838, Vol. XLIII, p. 735.

him as a poet alongside of Tennyson was criticism run mad.

The feeling about Tennyson which had now laid hold of Wilson was again displayed in an article which appeared in April of the following year.[1] It was entitled 'Christopher in his Alcove.' In this he brought together a number of poems written by those he called *Our* Young Poets. Special emphasis was laid upon the *our* in contrast to those whom before and afterwards he derisively termed the Young Poets, when he did not choose to call them "sumphs." His remarks are of interest and value for another reason. They confirm the statement previously made that a school of writers were consciously founding themselves upon Tennyson even at that early date, when his reputation could scarcely be said to have spread outside of a comparatively limited circle, and when he was slightingly spoken of by the ordinary professional critic. "All *our* young poets," wrote Wilson, "are fine, unaffected fellows, full of force and fire; and they would all, every mother's son of them, disdain themselves, did their consciences convict them of the sin of a single stanza, indited purposely to mystify some worthless truism, through the embroidered veil of its envelopment of gorgeous and gaudy words. The SUMPHS are all now of the Shelley, or of the Tennyson school—and, hear, O heavens! and give ear, O earth! disciples of WORDSWORTH! Surely the soles of the feet of at least half a score of them must now be tingling, prescient of the bastinado." Wilson had not yet

[1] Vol. XLV, p. 546.

become conscious of the fact—he was at a later period to learn it—that a generation was coming on which was to pay little heed to the blows inflicted by the bastinade or the crutch he wielded.

This was the state of mind in regard to Tennyson of the most influential critic of the fourth decade of the nineteenth century. In the review of Joanna Baillie in which began this series of attacks upon the poet, occurred the following passage in the general bespattering of praise which Wilson was wont to give to his own influence. There was indeed—at least there had been—a certain justification for what he said about it, though it was hardly from his lips that it could come with propriety. "Christopher North," he wrote, "is the tutor, the guardian, and the patron of the young poets. As they reverence him, they prosper—wanting the light of his countenance, they sicken in the shade, and prematurely die. But none who deserve it want the light of the countenance of the old man benign." These words attracted the attention of another reviewer who was at that very time proclaiming in the columns of 'The New Monthly Magazine' the merits of a young and but little-known poet whom he placed by the side of Shelley and Coleridge and Wordsworth. This reviewer was John Forster. He expostulated with his "esteemed contemporary," as he termed the critic of 'Blackwood's Magazine.' Accepting him at his own valuation, he called upon him to redeem his omission of a poet who was both young and great. Why had he not mentioned Mr. Browning, he asked? "Here is a young poet,"

he said, "or rather—for greatness takes no account of age—a great poet, and his book has been buzzed at by the critics, and Christopher North has remained silent." This could not continue, he was confident; the reason that it existed at all he suggested. "The old man eloquent," Forster went on to say, "prepares himself for a discourse on greatness in poetry, as distinguished from the 'small luminaries now in ascension'; and the illustration shall be 'Robert Browning.' "[1] But Wilson was neither moved by the flattery nor affected by the appeal. If indeed Tennyson's poetry was not in the range of his adequate appreciation, we can easily understand what would be his attitude towards that of Robert Browning. No criticism of that writer ever appeared in that magazine while Wilson was connected with it. Not even his name can be found in it for some time after a good deal of his best work had been produced.

Wilson had one final opportunity to demonstrate beyond question that resentment for a foolish attack could not merely blind his critical judgment but cause him to display a crowning ineptitude. The occasion came to him in 1842. It was duly improved. The first part of that year had seen the publication of Tennyson's two volumes. Of them he took no notice whatever. So far were they from being reviewed at the time in 'Blackwood's Magazine,' not even was the name of their author to be found for a long while anywhere in its pages, though it was now beginning to be heard on the tongue of every cultivated man.

[1] Vol. XLVI, p. 308, March, 1836.

But in the latter part of this same year appeared Macaulay's 'Lays of Ancient Rome.' From the outset the work was the greatest of successes. It was published in October. Before the end of December it had gone into a second edition, speedily to be followed by a third the following year. These were the precursors of innumerable others. It deserved all the success it won. Nor is it any denial of its excellence to assert that no competent critic would now pretend to put it on a level with the poetry contained in Tennyson's two volumes. Under ordinary conditions there would have been no one quicker than Wilson to recognize that, however good it was, it was nevertheless a work on a lower plane of achievement. But there were then a few critics who ranked it higher. Chief among these was Christopher North. By no one was it welcomed with more enthusiasm than by him.

Wilson had been a political opponent of Macaulay. In some, too, of the literary controversies in which the future historian had been engaged, the critic had taken him sharply to task. But in the number for December, 1842,[1] he rose, at least in his own opinion, above all purely partisan considerations. He sang a pæan in praise of the 'Lays of Ancient Rome' which was so remarkable for the fervor and extravagance of its eulogy that it ought to be printed alongside of Matthew Arnold's later disparagement. But though the fact is forgotten now, and perhaps was not much noticed then, it was equally remarkable for its oblique depreciation of Tennyson. There was really no

[1] Vol. LII, p. 802.

occasion to go out of his way to attack compositions so entirely different in character and subject from those of Macaulay that there was hardly a common ground for comparison. Yet this was the very course taken. Tennyson's name, to be sure, was not mentioned in Wilson's article. He may not indeed have been the only one the critic had in mind; but it is indisputable that it was he who was the one principally aimed at in the passages celebrating the superiority of Macaulay to the Young Poets, as he still continued disdainfully to designate them. These were spoken of as belonging to the Small Beer School. "The beer," he said, "may, like that of Trinity, be a very pretty beer, but it ought to learn to take things quietly, and be less ambitious."

"For a good many years," said Wilson later in the article, "have we been praising the Young Poets—not without a sense of the ludicrous, patting their puerile heads. . . . Our Young Poets, as Fanny Kemble used to say of herself in her Journal, potter, potter, potter, and all about themselves; morning, noon, and night, they potter, potter, potter all about their own dear, sweet, consumptive, passionate, small, infantile selves—trying at times to look fierce, nay facetious—and in the very whirlwind of passion, sufficiently tropical to lift up a curl tastefully disposed on their organ of identity three inches broad, are they seen picking obsolete-looking words out of a pocket edition of Walker's Pronouncing Dictionary." This and much more like this can be found in the article which celebrated the superiority of Macaulay to these

young poets. It is a striking illustration of the want of discernment which in the case of Tennyson had come to overcloud the perspicacity of him who was generally regarded as the foremost literary critic of the time. It reminds one of the sort of judgment passed on Shakespeare by the criticasters of the period following the Restoration.

This however was the last outburst of a like character on the part of Wilson. As time went on a public opinion was forming about the poet which he with all his recklessness and hardihood dared no longer defy—at all events his publisher did not. Henceforth Wilson did not venture to speak of Tennyson in the jaunty way in which he had at first patronized him or, to use his own phrase, patted his head. Nor can there be much doubt that susceptible as the critic was to literary achievement, he could not easily refrain from admiring the excellence of much of the work the poet had accomplished. Scattered through the pages of the magazine during the years following the appearance of the volumes of 1842 are a few references to Tennyson which are fairly complimentary in their character, though none are unduly so. The highest published compliment Wilson ever paid the poet can be found in what is on the whole a favorable review of Miss Barrett's works.[1] This appeared in November, 1844. While making as a matter of course his usual remarks about the existing dearth of poetical genius, Wilson gave to her productions high and discerning praise. He did not neglect to point out her faults

1 'Blackwood's Magazine,' Vol. LVI, pp. 621-639.

but he treated them merely as blemishes. He furthermore spoke of 'Lady Geraldine's Courtship' as belonging to the Tennysonian school. This was a discovery of his not much relished by the authoress. While he accorded the poem a certain amount of praise, he declared it as "deficient throughout in that finished elegance of style which distinguishes the work of the great artist from whom it is imitated." Tennyson had not been advanced by him to the rank of a great poet: but he had got along far enough to be recognized as a great artist.

This was the sole instance in which Wilson wantoned into anything which looked like extravagance of admiration. During these years he gave a grudging recognition to the genius of Tennyson; but he never abandoned the belief that while he was what he had once called him, a true poet, he was by no means a great one. His criticisms throughout furnish one of the most striking exemplifications of the fact that a man brought up in one school of poetry is often found absolutely incapable of appreciating the greatness of a writer belonging to a new school. Wilson never ceased to deplore the falling off in literary achievement from the men of the Georgian era of the men belonging to the Victorian era. "After Scott's time," he wrote in 1844, "till the middle of the nineteenth century not a single novelist; after the death of Byron, not a poet!" The belles-lettres in his opinion were utterly in abeyance. "As regards the state of literature," he remarked in another place in this same article, "take out your pencils . . . and make out a

list of the works published during the last five years, likely to be known, *even by name,* a hundred years hence.'"[1] Wilson ignored the poems of Tennyson; he was apparently ignorant of the existence of Browning; he seemed to forget the lays of Macaulay over which he had not long before waxed enthusiastic. But not to speak of other authors in prose, three novels of Dickens—'Nicholas Nickleby,' 'The Old Curiosity Shop,' and 'Barnaby Rudge'—had appeared during the five years preceding as well as a good deal of the early work of Thackeray, though that writer had not then obtained a general recognition of his greatness. Fortunate it is for most criticism that its verdicts and conclusions sleep unknown and undisturbed in the forgotten pages of contemporary periodicals.

Yet Wilson's attitude towards the writers who were coming forward to take the place of their elders was not different from that of many of those who belonged to his own generation or the one immediately succeeding. Insensibility to Tennyson's claims in particular was far from being a characteristic peculiar to himself. But the sins of others were largely due to pure unadulterated ignorance. They knew little, or often absolutely nothing of the literature produced by the men of the younger generation. It is quite manifest from his biography that Macaulay, at the time just spoken of and later, had never looked at a poem of Tennyson's. It was not till towards the close of his life that he tells us that the reading of 'Guinevere' in the 'Idylls of the King' brought tears to his eyes.

1 'Blackwood's Magazine,' May, 1844, Vol. LV, p. 560.

But this was not so with Wilson. With him it was not lack of knowledge, but lack of appreciation; or rather the disposition not to appreciate which for years he had been sedulously cultivating. He was perpetually complaining of the prevailing dearth of poetical genius. The men of to-day were in his eyes very respectable men; but it was useless to compare them with the men of the immediate past. Wilson never could be persuaded that the best of the poets then on the stage were equal to the poorest of the earlier generation. In 1844 a German traveller records an interview he had had with him while in Scotland. "It seemed to me," he wrote in his report of it, "that the Professor, though cheerful, spoke rather hopelessly of the rising English literature—and especially of the young poets."[1] To this view his own direct utterances conform. "Poetry appears for the time wellnigh extinguished," he wrote in 1845. "We have some charming ballads from Tennyson; some touching lines from Miss Barret; but where are the successors of Scott and Byron, of Campbell and Southey?"[2] A good deal can be said for the introduction of the first two names; but the bathos of critical inbecility is reached when Campbell and above all Southey are reckoned superior to Tennyson and Browning.

This doleful state of mind continued on Wilson's part to the day of his death. As late as April, 1850, he expressed the same sentiment of modified despair in a review of 'Festus.' "We seem to have amongst

[1] 'Tait's Edinburgh Magazine,' October, 1844, Vol. XI, p. 642.
[2] 'Blackwood's Magazine,' September, 1845, Vol. LVIII, p. 341.

us good poets still," he wrote, "but they have ceased to produce good poems. We have much genuine poetry diffused through our literature, and not a new work of art added to our possessions."[1] But as time went on, it became apparent to the publisher of 'Blackwood's Magazine,' if it did not to its leading contributor, that it would no longer do for a periodical of its literary pretensions to persist in ignoring the claims to consideration of the one man who was daily becoming more and more the favorite of the public. It could not afford to content itself with mere references to him either depreciatory or laudatory. He was a new force that had to be reckoned with. He could neither be pooh-poohed nor patronized. The maintenance of silence on its part would have no effect upon the reputation of Tennyson but would have a good deal upon that of the magazine. So in April, 1849, seven years after the publication of the two volumes of poems, and a little more than a year after the publication of 'The Princess,' came out a belated review of both productions.[2] It was on the whole very complimentary. In fact such was getting to be the temperament of the public that it was becoming a somewhat risky procedure for either reviewer or review to be otherwise. There was accordingly a respectful tone preserved throughout towards the poet, even where an unfavorable opinion was expressed of particular pieces.

1 'Blackwood's Magazine,' Vol. LXVII, p. 416.
2 *Ibid.*, Vol. LXV, pp. 453-467.

But along with its laudatory passages the review was a good deal disfigured by the offensive assumption of that highly superior attitude on the part of the critic who makes it a point to find unendurable what the vast majority of cultivated men have learned to love. The verdict, however, pronounced on particular pieces shows conclusively that Wilson had no hand in the article either in the way of composition or correction. Its opinions were directly contrary to those he had previously expressed. He had been enthusiastic about the 'Ode to Memory' which the general voice has always regarded as one of the finest poems of Tennyson's first volume. He had described it as eminently beautiful. Not so felt the succeeding critic in the same magazine. In one place he spoke of it as incomprehensible. In another he described it as a poem "which craves to be extinguished, which ought in charity to be forgotten." He succinctly described it as an utter failure. "We cannot read it again," he continued, "to enable us to speak quite positively, but we do not think there is a single redeeming line in the whole of it." 'Mariana,' too, which Wilson had quoted in its entirety for its profound pathos, was condemned as was also 'Oriana,' which he had characterized as perhaps the most beautiful of Tennyson's ballad compositions. There is always a certain interest in the resuscitation of these dead and buried specimens of asinine criticism. For this reason it may be well to rescue from the grave to which they have been consigned the remarks

here found on one of the most famous of the poems of the second volume which Wilson never reviewed. In it Tennyson is spoken of as "torturing himself to unite old *balladry* with modern sentiment in his *Lady of Shallott,* forever rhyming with that detested town of *Camelot.*"

For such exhibitions of crass incompetence of appreciation Wilson can be fully absolved. But he never broke his silence about Tennyson. We talk of the sensitiveness of authors. Can anything be shown surpassing this display of it by him whom no small number of cultivated readers looked upon as the first critic of his time? Wilson did not die until 1854. His connection with 'Blackwood's Magazine,' though naturally becoming less close with the advance of age, did not cease entirely until 1852, when the last contribution from his pen came out in its September number. During the half-score years which preceded his retirement the fame of Tennyson had been steadily rising and broadening. New editions of the 'Poems' of 1842 were coming out with increasing frequency. The whole English-speaking world had their eyes fixed upon everything and anything which came from his pen. 'The Princess' of 1847 had been followed by the 'In Memoriam' of 1850. The publication of the latter volume had been the great literary event of the year. Acclaim practically universal had attended a few months later the appointment of its author to the poet laureateship. But during all these years incidental references to Tennyson—and they not numer-

ous—are all that the once catholic critic thought fit to make. To the very last Wilson did all that lay in his power to justify the application to himself of the epithets of "crusty, rusty, musty, fusty Christopher," by which he had been designated.

CHAPTER XIX

TENNYSON'S PENSION AND BULWER'S ATTACK

Frequently has it been said that the success of the 'Poems' of 1842 was both immediate and unmeasured; that Tennyson leaped at once into universal acceptance. Such an assertion would be very far from conforming to fact. The truth is that the growth of Tennyson's reputation after the appearance of these volumes, while in one sense rapid, was in another gradual. It could not well have been otherwise. Both in thought and expression his poetic utterance was widely different from anything which had gone before. If it had a resemblance to the utterance of any preceding poet, it was to that of Keats; and at that time, so far as the mass of even educated men was concerned, Keats had not yet become a potent factor in English literature. The poetry of Tennyson accordingly, as it was of a distinctly new type, was in its nature revolutionary; and like all things revolutionary had to fight its way to general acceptance. It found at once, it is true, a large body of admirers, who were not at all under the bondage of the past. But those who had been brought up in the admiration and enjoyment of the utterance of other poetic schools—and necessarily to this class belonged a large body of highly cultivated men—were disposed to look askance

upon this new aspirant who had a most distinct manner of his own and a manner to which they were not in the slightest degree accustomed. Their prejudices gave way slowly. They were reluctant to concede that a new literary dynasty had been established, that a new literary monarch had arisen. To him they were little disposed to pay their allegiance.

There is no doubt that men of the old school were a good deal astounded by the welcome which Tennyson's poetry had received and by the enthusiasm with which his partisans hailed him. They were usually puzzled by it and occasionally made indignant. These poems, so highly praised, did not impress them favorably in most cases; in some cases they impressed them very unfavorably. Readers of Thackeray will recall how amazed and bewildered was Colonel Newcome by the opinions he heard expressed on his return to England after thirty years spent in India. They were not the opinions of his time. He learned from the men who were his son's companions that young Keats was a genius to be estimated in future days with young Raphael, and that a young gentleman at Cambridge who had lately published two volumes of verses might take rank with the greatest poets of all. He tried in vain to construe 'Œnone.' Though he understood 'Ulysses,' he could not see any sense in the prodigious laudations it received. Thackeray, writing in the sixth decade of the century, can be forgiven for his anachronism; for the time of this part of his novel is that of the fourth decade and one of the two works he specifies and all the sentiments he records belong

to the fifth. But for that last period they represent accurately the feelings prevalent among the men of the younger generation and the bewilderment and frequently the disquiet of those of the older.

Still, all great work in art steadily rises in estimation under constant examination. The converts that Tennyson made, he kept. They belonged, furthermore, to the class whose influence was growing steadily; and the effect of their appreciation showed itself in a rapidly enlarging circle of admirers. Before the earnest advocacy of these, indifference and hostility rapidly gave way. The changing attitude of this band of readers who began with a prejudice against the poet can be seen faithfully reflected in the correspondence of Mary Russell Mitford. Her letters re-echo at first all the critical platitudes about Tennyson which had been current during the preceding ten years of silence. "Do you know Alfred Tennyson's poems?" she wrote to one of her friends on the eighth of June, 1842. "They are in the last degree mannered and obscure (I always doubt if these *dark* people know their own meaning), still some of his things, especially 'Mariana in the Moated Grange,' have great merit, so that I have been pleased at finding one of the best of the new poems taken avowedly 'from a pastoral of Miss Mitford's,' 'Dora Creswell.'" Before a year had gone by, this patronizing appreciation had changed into enthusiastic admiration. She then had learned to prefer Tennyson to any poet of the age. On the twenty-seventh of February, 1843, she communicated to this same friend certain facts about the

success of his work. "Dear Miss Barrett," she wrote, "whose health is better, has a volume ready, but no bookseller will incur the risk of publishing poetry. Moxon says that he has lost by every one except Alfred Tennyson; to be sure, the exception proves a growing taste for high poetry, for I think his three lovely volumes the most delicious that have appeared for many years. Indeed I know nothing in modern times equal to 'Mariana,' 'The Sleeping Beauty' and 'Locksley Hall.'"

If this remark of Moxon be accurate as well as accurately reported, and not subject to that modification which it is frequently desirable to make in the statements of the most scrupulous publisher, it does give a somewhat gloomy view of the fondness for verse then prevalent; for Moxon had brought out or was bringing out the works of the most eminent poets of the day; at least of the generation just going off the stage, like Wordsworth and Campbell and Rogers, as well as of the younger men like Henry Taylor and Trench and Browning. His views of what constituted success could indeed have been hardly deemed extravagant, for the edition he had just about disposed of consisted, as we have seen, of but eight hundred copies. The sale, to be sure, was steadily going on; yet it took two years more to exhaust the thousand copies of the second edition. As a consequence of so doing, it became necessary to bring out a third, which appeared duly in the middle of June, 1845. This consisted of an unrecorded but manifestly larger number of copies. In July, 1846, Browning wrote to

the woman soon to become his wife that he had been that morning with Moxon. The publisher told him that he had sold fifteen hundred of Tennyson's 'Poems' during the year and that he was about to bring out another edition in consequence.[1]

But while such a number was respectable, and even seems large, as the sale of poetry of a high grade went then, while indeed it proved that the reputation of Tennyson had already begun to overshadow that of his contemporaries, it is obvious that at this rate it was hopeless to entertain expectations of pecuniary support from that source. As if this were not enough, a new embarrassment was now added to the poet's situation. His means had been far from ample to start on; but such as they were, they had now become largely dissipated by an injudicious investment. He had been led to take part in one of those alluring enterprises which, occasionally crowned with great success, ordinarily result in dismal failure. This instance proved no exception to the general rule. Resident near the family at High Beech was a physician, a certain Dr. Matthew Allen, described by Carlyle as a "speculative, hopeful, earnest-frothy man." He had become interested in a scheme which he had invented or adopted for making oak furniture by machinery. The enterprise was to be both philanthropic and pecuniarily profitable, two results which are not often easy to harmonize, at least at the outset. It was expected that by the process such furniture could be put within the means of all, besides securing

1 'Browning Letters,' Vol. II, p. 335.

the fortunes of those concerned in promoting it. In this enterprise the enthusiastic physician succeeded in gaining the co-operation of the Tennysons. Especially was this true of the poet. He invested in it the proceeds of a little estate in Grasby, Lincolnshire, and a legacy of five hundred pounds left him by an aunt of Arthur Hallam. The scheme collapsed entirely, necessarily with disastrous results to Tennyson's means. The blow was to some extent broken by his brother-in-law, Edmund Lushington, insuring in 1844 Dr. Allen's life for a portion of the debt due to the poet. The physician on his part atoned, so far as lay in his power, for the misfortune he had caused, by obligingly dying in January, 1845.

Consequently, while the literary prospects of Tennyson were brightening, his pecuniary prospects, never up to this time brilliant, were perceptibly darkened. Still less than ever was he in a position of independence. To a man who desired to devote himself to the pursuit of literature pure and simple, the outlook for the future could hardly have failed to seem peculiarly disheartening. His feelings during this period are portrayed in a letter to a friend written after the receipt of his pension in October, 1845. "I have gone," he said, "thro' a vast deal of suffering (as to money difficulties in my family etc.) since I saw you last, and would not live it over again for quadruple the pension Peel has given me."[1] Personal troubles were added to pecuniary. The correspondence with her who was subsequently to become his wife had

[1] 'Memoir,' Vol. I, p. 226.

been for years forbidden. The prospect of marriage had been poor enough before. Still less was there now anything to justify the belief that he would be in a position to support a family. Troubles afflicting either the heart or the pocket-book are never conducive to vigor. Coming together, they affected Tennyson's physical condition so seriously that we are told that his friends despaired of the continuance of his life.[1] Hypochondria had set in with all its morbid anxieties about health and its utter depression of spirits. Reports about him and his condition are conflicting in the correspondence of the period. At one time they are favorable, at another time they are unfavorable. We know that in 1844 he resorted for a while to a hydropathic establishment at Cheltenham. This same method of re-establishing his health he tried years later.

The mention by Tennyson of his pension brings to the front the question of the agency by which it was secured. While the tributes that were increasingly paid to his eminence were unquestionably agreeable, they were not of a nature to contribute to his support, save indirectly. As the earnest desire existed among his friends, who were also friends to literature, that he should have the means to give himself up to his life-work, undisturbed by pecuniary anxieties, they conceived the idea of securing him a pension from the Literary Fund at the disposal of the government. In this they were eventually successful. One story of the way in which it was secured—the one commonly

1 'Memoir,' Vol. I, p. 221.

accepted—was told by Wemyss Reid in his life of Lord Houghton. As given there, it has been adopted, too, in what may be called the official biography of the poet by his son, who himself heard more than once the details recited in the presence of his father. Accordingly, it may seem to have received the sanction of the latter; that he accepted as true all that is implied by it. At any rate, the account deserves not merely relation but precedence.

Among the friends of the poet who were most earnest in the movement for securing the pension was Carlyle. He found in Tennyson, as he wrote to Emerson, one of the few figures "who are and remain beautiful to me." "I do not," he said further in the same letter, "meet in these late decades such company over a pipe." As early as October, 1844, he had written to FitzGerald that "it has struck me as a distinctly necessary Act of Legislation that Alfred should have a Pension of £150 a year."[1] FitzGerald undoubtedly sympathized with this view; but he could not furnish any help. Naturally Carlyle turned to quarters more likely to be of influence in securing the result. He it was who one day in his home at Cheyne Row addressed one of Tennyson's friends, who was a member of Parliament, and was supposed to have some influence with the prime minister.

"Milnes," said he, as he took his pipe out of his mouth, "when are you going to get that pension for Alfred Tennyson?"

1 'New Letters of Thomas Carlyle,' edited by Alexander Carlyle, Vol. I, p. 322.

"My dear Carlyle," answered Milnes, "the thing is not so easy as you seem to suppose. What will my constituents say if I do get the pension for Tennyson? They know nothing about him or his poetry, and they will probably think he is some poor relation of my own, and that the whole affair is a job."

"Richard Milnes," replied Carlyle solemnly, "on the Day of Judgment when the Lord asks you why you didn't get that pension for Alfred Tennyson, it will not do to lay the blame on your constituents; it is *you* that will be damned."

Milnes according to this account had not needed any entreaties to spur him to the effort. A pension of £200 was available. Application had already been made to Sir Robert Peel to bestow it upon two different persons. One was Tennyson, the other the veteran dramatist, James Sheridan Knowles. The latter was now over sixty years of age, and though his plays had in general been successful, he was far from being in affluent circumstances. Peel applied to Milnes for advice, accompanying his request with the remark that he knew absolutely nothing about either man.

"What," said Milnes, "have you never seen the name of Sheridan Knowles on a playbill?"

"No," was Peel's answer.

"And have you never read a poem of Tennyson's?" Again the answer was "No." At Peel's request that he should enable him to see something which Tennyson had written, Milnes sent him 'Locksley Hall' and 'Ulysses.' How he managed to do it without sending him the volume containing the rest of the poems we

are not told. With these pieces went a letter in which Milnes said that if the pension was granted as an act of charity, it should go to Knowles, who was infirm as well as advanced in years; if, on the contrary, in the interests of English literature and the English nation, it should be given to Tennyson.

That Peel should never have read at that time a poem of Tennyson's, however much it may have surprised Milnes, would have been in itself far from surprising. Very few men of his years, occupied as he constantly was with the consideration of great political questions, have the leisure, even if they have the desire, to keep up with the literature which has sprung up during their absorption in affairs of state. If they maintain their acquaintance with any literature at all, it is fairly certain to be that with which they have become familiar in earlier years. Occasional exceptions may be found. Of Peel himself it is reported that he made it a point of learning a verse every night before he went to bed, to take away, he said, the taste of the House of Commons.[1] If so, he had never lost his appreciation of poetry as poetry. Furthermore, we learn from his correspondence that he was well acquainted with the writings of contemporary English authors, of whom it would be natural to suppose he knew little or nothing. In November, 1844, in placing a sum of the public money at the disposal of the dying Hood, he assured that author that "There can be little which you have written that I have not read."

[1] 'Notes from a Diary, 1892-1895,' by Sir Mountstuart E. Grant Duff, 1904, Vol. II, p. 8.

Still it would be in no wise surprising that a man like him, constantly engaged in political strife, should never have read any of Tennyson's productions. Well known as the poet's name had become to the men of the younger generation, it was positively unknown to many of the older. Of the insensibility of the men of this older generation to what was going on before their eyes, of their ignorance of it, there are plenty of illustrations. In Macaulay's diary for March 9, 1850, occurs, for instance, this extraordinary prophecy, "It is odd," he wrote, "that the last twenty-five years, which have witnessed the greatest progress ever made in physical science—the greatest victories ever achieved by man over matter—should have produced hardly a volume that will be remembered in 1900." A little later in the same year we find him writing to Henry Taylor in acknowledgment of the reception of that dramatist's play of 'The Virgin Widow.' He spoke of it as being what its author had meant it to be—cheerful, graceful, and gentle. "Nevertheless," he continued, " 'Philip Van Artevelde' is still, in my opinion, the best poem that the last thirty years have produced; and I wish that you would deprive it of that pre-eminence, a feat which nobody but yourself seems likely to accomplish.'"[1] Could a more suggestive illustration be furnished of the worthlessness of contemporary criticism of the productions of the imagination? The quarter of the century, whose intellectual poverty was so strongly pointed out by Macaulay,

[1] Letter dated from the Albany, June 6, 1850, 'Correspondence of Sir Henry Taylor,' p. 188.

had witnessed the production of much of the best work of both Tennyson and Browning in poetry; of Dickens and Thackeray and Carlyle in prose; not to speak of no small number of writers like Bulwer, Disraeli, Kingsley, and others who still continue to be remembered and read.

Accordingly, if a man like Macaulay, whose interests lay primarily in literature, was utterly unfamiliar with Tennyson's poetry in 1850, Peel can hardly be blamed if several years earlier he had never even heard of his existence. Yet there is evidence that a long while before the pension was conferred upon the poet, the statesman was acquainted with his name, if not with his writings. On the death of Southey in 1843, Fanny Kemble, at the instigation of Bryan Waller Procter, had written to Lord Francis Egerton, later Earl of Ellesmere, to engage his interest in securing for Tennyson the post of poet laureate. The reason she gave for her application was the somewhat distressful circumstances in which the poet had been left by the failure of Dr. Allen's scheme for wood-carving. Procter indeed had told her that Tennyson had been "utterly ruined" by it. The nobleman to whom she applied, informed her that he had discovered that Wordsworth had already been selected for the position. On March 31, he added, however, "a suggestion of Sir Robert Peel's, involving a palliation of Mr. T.'s complaint."[1] What the "palliation" was is not specified, but it was probably the same which, as we shall see, was later offered through Hallam and

[1] 'Memories of the Tennysons,' by H. D. Rawnsley, p. 89.

not accepted. It is a reasonable inference from this communication that Peel had even then some knowledge of the poet and his writings. At all events, his correspondence, as published, renders it necessary to receive Milnes's statements about the prime minister's ignorance with certain grains of allowance, if not to revise them altogether. Other friends besides him were certainly active, other agencies were at work besides his towards securing the pension. It ought to be added that it was secured without Tennyson's privity or co-operation, as had been the previous application of Fanny Kemble. "Something in that word 'pension' sticks in my gizzard," he wrote not long after its reception; "it is only the name, and perhaps would 'smell sweeter' by some other." But he had the consolation of feeling that it had been secured for him by others, and not by any efforts of his own. "I have done nothing slavish to get it," he wrote to one of his friends; "I never even solicited for it either by myself or thro' others."[1] Furthermore, he had been assured by the prime minister in offering it that he need not be hindered by it in the public expression of any opinion he chose to adopt.

So far as can be gathered from Peel's correspondence, it was not Milnes, but Henry Hallam who first called his attention to both the merits and the needs of the poet.[2] On the eleventh of February, 1845, the historian wrote a letter to the prime minister on the subject of securing a pension for Tennyson, "whose

1 'Memoir,' Vol. I, p. 227.
2 Sir Robert Peel, from his Private Papers, London, 1899, Vol. III, pp. 439-442.

name," he added, "must be familiar to you, even if you have never looked at his writings. Perhaps I do not overstate the fact when I say that he is considered by many as the very first among the younger class of living poets. He is at least a man of a fertile and thoughtful mind, and few would hesitate to ascribe to him the high praise of genius." Hallam then went on to refer Peel to Rogers and to Henry Taylor for their estimate of the man in whose behalf he was writing. He could easily mention others, he said, "Mr. Milnes, for example, whose judgment in poetry deserves considerable regard." He concluded his letter with observing that Tennyson was by no means prosperous in worldly circumstances, but much the reverse.

Four days later Peel replied to this application. It is evident from his words that he was favorably disposed towards the request but lacked the means to comply with it. Furthermore, we have his own assurance that Tennyson's poetry was not at that time wholly unfamiliar to him, though there is nothing to show when or how he first became acquainted with it. "I have read," he wrote, "some of Mr. Tennyson's works and have formed *a very high estimate* of his powers." The words italicized were italicized by the prime minister himself. He added, however, that he had no means for making any permanent provision for the poet. Every shilling, he said, of the miserable pittance granted by the Crown for Civil List pensions had been appropriated. He could, however, relieve any temporary embarrassment from a very limited

public fund occasionally used for the relief of men of letters. Out of this he could grant Tennyson £200, and would do so if acceptable to his feelings. Manifestly it was not acceptable to his feelings, or to the feelings of Hallam. Such a gift would imply a necessity which did not exist. So the matter slumbered for seven months.

But Peel neither lost sight of the poet nor forgot Hallam's application in the poet's behalf. On the twenty-first of September, he wrote to the historian that he now had at his disposal £400 for pensions. Two hundred of this he was purposing to grant to Professor James David Forbes, of the University of Edinburgh, for the services he had rendered to science. Then he went on to speak of Tennyson. "The impressions left on my mind by the poems," he wrote, "confirmed as they are by the highest testimonies I could receive in his favour—your own and that of Mr. Rogers—will induce me, should it be agreeable to Mr. Tennyson, to submit his name to the Queen, with my humble recommendation to her Majesty that a pension of 200 l. per annum should be granted to him for his life." Hallam replied the following day, thanking Peel warmly. In it he spoke of Tennyson as "a man of great poetical genius, and one, as I can add, of almost chivalrous honour and purity of character; and that you will have the response of applause from the lovers of poetry, especially the younger of both sexes, who regard Tennyson as the first name among the later cultivators of that sacred field." Hallam at once communicated the information

to the poet; and Tennyson wrote to the minister from Cheltenham on the twenty-ninth of this same month gratefully accepting the offer. On the first of October, Peel informed him of his intention to advise the Crown to confer this mark of royal favor "on one who has devoted to worthy purposes great intellectual powers." On the fifteenth of this same month the pension was granted.

From the account which has just been given, two facts become evident. One is that Milnes's could not have been the only agency, hardly even the principal agency, in securing the pension for the poet. He may indeed have been the first to call the attention of the prime minister to the matter, possibly in conversation; for no contemporary record of his efforts has so far appeared in print. In this way the account of his action given in his biography may be harmonized with the facts as they appear in Peel's correspondence. Still, it is manifest that the statesman made up his mind independently—a circumstance all the more complimentary to the poet. It is Hallam who refers to Milnes; it is not Peel. It is a natural inference indeed that the latter relied little upon the judgment of his colleague as compared with that of the historian and of Rogers. The second fact which is brought out distinctly is the general acknowledgment which had then come to prevail of the superiority of Tennyson to all the poets of his generation. This was especially true of the view taken by the younger men; and their opinion would necessarily become in a few years that of the whole nation.

There was unquestionably some doubt entertained, and even occasionally expressed, as to the policy of conferring a pension upon a man of letters who was then in the prime of life. Still the same objection would have applied to a man of science like Professor Forbes who was born in the same year as the poet. Nevertheless, a feeling of this sort prevailed even in friendly official quarters. Gladstone, whom Peel consulted, observed that Tennyson was but a young man for a pension. "As to his genius," he remarked, "I will not trouble you with any eulogy of mine, but will observe that Mr. Rogers told me he considered him by much the first among all the younger poets of this generation." Then followed an expression of personal opinion which reveals the general sentiment existing at that time that little pecuniary return could be hoped for or expected by him who gave up his life to the cultivation of literature pure and simple. The foreboding entertained, contrasted with the subsequent fortunes of the man who was made its subject, reads somewhat strangely now. "Still it appears established," concluded Gladstone, "that though a true and even a great poet, he can hardly become a popular, and is much more likely to be a starving one."

There was, however, nothing peculiar in the belief just recorded. Much the same feeling about the poet's worldly success in the calling to which he had devoted himself is indicated rather than expressed in an unpublished letter of Rogers. From this an extract has been taken by one of Tennyson's biographers. It is dated October 20 of this same year, thus following

close upon the gift of the pension. It is peculiarly characteristic of the writer, who was wont to couple the doing of generous things with the saying of ones frequently far from being entitled to that epithet. "Tennyson," wrote Rogers, "is by many thought unfit for a pension; but he has many infirmities, such as to you I hope will be ever unknown, and such as make him utterly incapable of supporting himself. Of his genius I need say nothing, and have only to wish that I could always understand him."[1] The praise given in this extract can hardly be called unduly enthusiastic; but it distinctly surpassed the gift of prophecy which he took occasion to utter. Rogers lived long enough to recognize the folly of his prediction of Tennyson's incapacity to support himself. It is one of the misfortunes of old age that it is constantly compelled to witness the failure of most of its prophetic utterances, in particular of those about contemporaries.

However satisfactory the gift of the pension was to the admirers of the poet, it was unquestionably a subject of vexation to his detractors. Especially was this the case with those of them who were still affected by the traditions of the eighteenth century. Such persons too were much more numerous than might have been supposed. We have seen that the praise given by the leading periodicals had never gone beyond the limits of proper critical decorum. We cannot tell in any given case, to be sure, how much the enthusiasm

[1] 'Lord Tennyson, a Biographical Sketch,' by Henry J. Jennings, 1892, p. 106.

of the writer may have been tempered by the judicial discretion of the editor; for those were the days in which the conductors of periodicals assumed the right to tamper not only with the language but with the opinions of the contributors, even those most noted, to an extent which, if exercised now, would tend to sever all relations between the two parties. In the review, for instance, which Leigh Hunt wrote of the 'Poems' of 1842, a paragraph containing gross personal abuse of John Mitchell Kemble was inserted by the editor without the writer's knowledge or consent. Even the mild praise given in the 'Quarterly' to Tennyson's work excited the indignation of some of its old supporters. It was hard enough for Lockhart to be compelled to eat his own words by admitting to the periodical he edited an article which contradicted in numerous ways his previous utterances on the same poet and the same poems. Yet he had to undergo the further discomfort of being censured for allowing so much praise to be given at all. "I may permit myself to mention," he wrote, "that Mr. Croker was gravely offended by the second review favourable to Tennyson, when that poet came forth and broke silence in 1842."[1] The old critical guard died discredited and disregarded, it is true; but it never surrendered. It never pandered to the depraved taste which had turned aside from the old gods to burn incense at the shrines which had been set up by the worshippers of the new. As Croker lived until 1857, he had ample time and constant opportunity to grieve over the

[1] A. Lang's 'Lockhart,' Vol. II, p. 287.

degenerate taste which had come to reckon Tennyson the greatest of contemporary poets.

The conferring of the pension led, however, to one memorable attack which came near furnishing a prominent chapter in the quarrels of authors. Such certainly would have been the case if Tennyson's sensitiveness to criticism, excessive as it was, had not been surpassed by his self-restraint. The one responsible for the attack was Bulwer, who on his mother's death in 1843 had assumed the surname of Lytton. Up to a certain date the fortunes of the two men had not been dissimilar; in truth, they may be said to have borne at the beginning a somewhat singular resemblance. Like Tennyson, Bulwer had begun his career as a poet. Like him he had published a volume when he was only seventeen years old. It bore on the title-page that it was written between the ages of thirteen and fifteen. Like him, too, he had gained the Chancellor's medal at Cambridge for a prize poem. Here, however, the comparison practically ends. Before he had taken his degree in 1826, Bulwer had published three volumes of verse. But from none of them did he gain any real literary repute. That came to him with his second novel, 'Pelham,' which appeared in 1828, and which made dandyism for a while fashionable. It is also said, whether truly or untruly, to have introduced the fashion of wearing black coats for evening dress.

It was upon his novels mainly, but partly upon his parliamentary labors and partly upon his plays, that Bulwer built up his reputation. During his whole

career, however, he had occasional lapses into verse. One of these he had distinct reason to regret. It was a work which came out in piecemeal. Towards the end of December, 1845, appeared the first part of a poem entitled 'The New Timon.' It was followed on January 12, 1846, by Part II, and on February 4 by Part III. A little later appeared Part IV, which completed the work. Though the volume in a few years passed out of notice and has now largely gone out of remembrance, it achieved at the time a temporary popularity or at least notoriety, both in England and America. Several editions of it were called for in the course of the year. Attention had been at once attracted to its first part by certain spirited characterizations it contained of men prominent in public life. These were the Duke of Wellington, Sir Robert Peel, O'Connell, and Lord Stanley, the future Earl of Derby. To this last-named a phrase had been applied by Disraeli in a speech delivered in the House of Commons in April, 1844. He had there styled him "the Rupert of debate." This description Bulwer seized upon and may be said to have popularized. It has perhaps done more to keep alive the memory of the poem than all the incidents it contained, or the scenes it depicted.

'The New Timon' was anonymous. It professed indeed to be written by an Anglo-Indian. In a note explaining a phrase found in the text its author spoke of it as "familiar to those who, like the writer, have resided in the vast Empire we govern and forget." Indeed great care seems to have been taken at the

outset to guard the secret of the authorship, though attention had been sedulously called to the work long before it was published, by copies of this first part having been sent to persons prominent in social and political life. Bulwer himself insisted for a time that he had nothing whatever to do with its composition. Even to his intimate friends he disclaimed having written it. But it speedily came to pass that hardly any one, whether friendly or hostile, went to the trouble of making even the pretence of believing his denial. Those connected with the periodical press who affected to do so, did it for the sake of making more bitter their personal attack upon the assumed unknown author. One favorite method to which they resorted was to point out the resemblances between the scenes and incidents in 'The New Timon' and similar scenes and incidents in Bulwer's novels. This furnished a pretext for denouncing the plagiarisms of the anonymous poet from the works of the prose writer of fiction. There was indeed no use in Bulwer's denying the authorship. The work was throughout in his manner. It had his tricks of expression, even his phrases, and followed the lines of development which had characterized some of his novels. But even with the poorest of these it could not compare. As a poem it was a very ordinary performance. When stripped of the adventitious aid of its personal references, it soon sank into forgetfulness. Bulwer in a short time came to recognize the uselessness as well as the folly of not acknowledging his responsibility for it. His poem of 'King Arthur,' published three

years later, not only bore his name on the title-page, but also described him as the author of 'The New Timon.'

It was in the second part which came out early in 1846 that the attack on Tennyson appeared. Without warning and without conceivable pretext the flow of the narrative was suddenly interrupted by the introduction of a paragraph in which the anonymous author, while celebrating his own Spartan severity of taste, expressed his lofty disdain of the meretricious charms with which his contemporary had sought to bedizen his muse. The passage began, too, with the same old reference to that mysterious love episode of his early life which Bulwer repeated so often that he seems to have finally come to believe it himself. It is in the following lines that the attack on Tennyson is contained:

> Me Life had skill'd!—to me, from woe and wrong,
> By Passion's tomb leapt forth the source of Song.
> The "*Quicquid agunt Homines,*"—whate'er
> Our actions teach us, and our natures share,
> Life and the World, our City and our Age,
> Have tried my spirit to inform my page;
> I seek no purfled prettiness of phrase,—
> A soul in earnest scorns the tricks for praise.
> If to my verse denied the Poet's fame,
> This merit, rare to verse that wins, I claim;
> No tawdry grace shall womanize my pen!
> Ev'n in a love-song, man should write for men!
> Not mine, not mine, (O Muse forbid!) the boon
> Of borrowed notes, the mock-bird's modish tune,
> The jingling medley of purloin'd conceits,
> Outbabying Wordsworth, and outglittering Keates,

Where all the airs of patchwork-pastoral chime
To drowsy ears in Tennysonian rhyme!
Am I enthrall'd but by the sterile rule,
The formal pupil of a frigid school,
If to old laws my Spartan tastes adhere,
If the old vigorous music charms my ear,
Where sense with sound, and ease with weight combine,
In the pure silver of Pope's ringing line;
Or where the pulse of man beats loud and strong
In the frank flow of Dryden's lusty song?
Let School-Miss Alfred vent her chaste delight
On "darling little rooms so warm and bright!"
Chaunt "I'm aweary," in infectious strain,
And catch her "blue fly singing i' the pane."
Tho' praised by Critics, tho' adored by Blues,
Tho' Peel with pudding plump the puling Muse,
Tho' Theban taste the Saxon's purse controuls,
And pensions Tennyson, while starves a Knowles,
Rather, be thou, my poor Pierian Maid,
Decent at least, in Hayley's weeds array'd,
Than patch with frippery every tinsel line,
And flaunt, admired, the Rag Fair of the Nine!

As if the attack in the lines were not enough, further comment full as offensive was made in the notes. In them Bulwer reprinted a part of the 'O Darling Room' of the volume of 1832, which Tennyson had silently dropped from his new edition. "The whole of this *Poem* (!!!)," he remarked, "is worth reading, in order to see to what depth of silliness the human intellect can descend." The other quotations given in the attack are from 'Mariana.' But it was the pension granted to Tennyson that stirred most Bulwer's bile. He expressed indignation at the failure of James

Sheridan Knowles to receive one and the preference that had been given to Tennyson. Of the poet himself and his work, Bulwer expressed no uncertain opinion. "The most that can be said of Mr. Tennyson," he wrote, "is, that he is the favourite of a small circle; to the mass of the Public little more than his name is known—he has moved no thousands—he has created no world of characters—he has laboured out no deathless truths, nor enlarged our knowledge of the human heart by the delineation of various and elevating passions—he has lent a stout shoulder to no sinking but manly cause, dear to the Nation and to Art; yet, if the uncontradicted statement in the journals be true, this Gentleman has been quartered on the public purse; he is in the prime of life, belonging to a wealthy family, without, I believe, wife or children; at the very time that Mr. Knowles was lecturing for bread in foreign lands, verging towards old age, unfriended even by the public he has charmed!—such is the justice of our Ministers, such the national gratitude to those whom we thank and—starve."

The accuracy of the information contained in this note as to Tennyson's pecuniary circumstances was on a level with the value of the criticism of his verse. Bulwer was a man of distinct and varied talents; but there was something preposterous in an author of his grade of poetical achievement venturing to assume a superior critical attitude towards Wordsworth and Keats, to say nothing of the unprovoked attack upon Tennyson. He was speedily to learn that he had

utterly mistaken the temper of the times. The attitude of the public towards Tennyson since the day that Lockhart could safely venture to publish his insolent review of 1833 had undergone not merely alteration, but a complete revolution. This every one saw and felt save the occasional survivors of outworn poetical creeds. Bulwer's verses were unquestionably relished by some of these even though they may have had no special admiration for the poem in which they appeared. Hostile criticism of Tennyson had come more and more to be kept in restraint with the progress of time; but the disposition to depreciate still survived and rejoiced in an attack it did not itself venture to make. Both the paragraph in the poem and the note accompanying it were copied with hardly disguised glee in 'The Literary Gazette' in its review of Part II of 'The New Timon.' There was at least one exhibition of the same state of mind in America. Here Bulwer's work was republished from the third edition. It was highly praised in an article written by Bartol, then a prominent Unitarian clergyman of Boston. This is worth noticing, not for its critical acumen which was less than nothing, but for the sympathy manifested with the attack made upon the poet. It occurs in a review of several volumes of verse, in which 'The New Timon' was singled out from the rest for especial laudation. It was characterized as "the most fresh and striking work of late English publication; and its strong style is a wholesome protest against the feeble sentimentality and slender ornaments of the whole

Tennyson school.'"[1] The poem received also high and really undeserved praise in a review of it by Lowell, though he censured the attack made in it on Wordsworth and Keats and Tennyson.[2]

But criticisms of this nature were far from representing the general attitude. Bulwer had unwittingly stirred up a hornet's nest. He speedily discovered that the circle of which Tennyson was a favorite was far from being the small one he had supposed. It must indeed have given him something of a shock to discover that the opinion expressed in his verses was so far from finding sympathizers that, outside of a very limited circle, it could hardly muster even apologists. A host of partisans at once rushed forward not merely to defend the assailed but to attack the assailant. The contemptuous tone often taken in the periodicals which reviewed 'The New Timon' on its completion was largely intensified by the resentment felt for his sneers at Tennyson and the futile efforts of the writer to escape responsibility for the authorship of the poem in which they were contained. In truth, the storm eventually became too violent to be endured. The scornful attitude which Bulwer had assumed towards the poet had been returned upon him with unexpected intensity. The second edition of the complete work appeared about the middle of March. Shortly after came out the third edition. Later in the year appeared a fourth edition. From

1 Article on 'Poetry and Imagination,' by the Rev. Cyrus Augustus Bartol in 'The Christian Examiner,' Vol. VII, 4th series, p. 263.

2 'North American Review,' Vol. LXIV, p. 467.

that the offensive paragraph in the poem and its accompanying notes were silently withdrawn and have never since been reprinted.

The incident itself brought to the attention of all at the time as well as to Bulwer himself the change which had come over the minds of men since Lockhart had published his review of 1833. Not unfrequent comment was made upon the fact. "Of the hold which his poetry has already taken on the public heart," wrote William Howitt, for example, in 1846, "a striking instance was lately given. The anonymous author of The New Timon stepped out of his way and his subject to represent Tennyson's muse as a puling school-miss. The universal outburst of indignation from the press scared the opprobrious lines speedily out of the snarler's pages. A new edition was quickly announced, from which they had wisely vanished." With the eventual disappearance of all interest in the work itself both these lines in it and the notes accompanying them were soon forgotten. In process of time, too, Tennyson came to have amicable relations with his assailant, at least outwardly amicable ones; for it is hard to believe that there could have been any genuine sympathy of feeling between two men so utterly dissimilar in character and motive. Still he prefixed to his drama of 'Harold,' published in 1876, a dedication to the second Lord Lytton. In the course of it he observed that the historical romance of the first lord had been one of his main helps in writing his own work. "Your father," he concluded, "dedi-

cated his 'Harold' to my father's brother; allow me to dedicate my Harold to yourself."

In the temporary tempest which arose, the sympathies of the men of the younger generation in particular, were, as might be supposed, almost entirely on the side of Tennyson. Among these were the writers concerned in the publication of 'Punch,' which had begun its existence five years before. The periodical came in consequence to take a somewhat memorable part in the controversy which sprang up. In the number for February 7, 1846, appeared the following little squib entitled ' "The New Timon" and Alfred Tennyson's Pension':

> You've seen a lordly mastiff's port,
> Bearing in calm contemptuous sort
> The snarls of some o'erpetted pup,
> Who grudges him his "bit and sup":
> So stands the bard of Locksley Hall
> While puny darts around him fall,
> Tipp'd with what Timon takes for venom;
> He is the mastiff, Tim the Blenheim.

The satire of these lines was poorer than anything to be found in Bulwer's poem. It indicated the resentment that prevailed, but was far from giving it adequate expression. But its feebleness was more than made up by Tennyson himself in a poem which appeared in the number for February 28 of this same periodical. It bore the title of 'The New Timon, and the Poets,' and had appended to it the signature of Alcibiades. Though the authorship of the poem was veiled, no one who had become familiar with Tenny-

son's style could fail to detect the writer who was responsible for the following lines:

We knew him, out of Shakespeare's art,
And those fine curses which he spoke;
The old Timon, with his noble heart,
That, strongly loathing, greatly broke.

So died the Old: here comes the New.
Regard him: a familiar face:
I *thought* we knew him: What, it's you,
The padded man — that wears the stays—

Who kill'd the girls and thrill'd the boys,
With dandy pathos when you wrote,
A Lion, you, that made a noise,
And shook a mane *en papillotes.*

And once you tried the Muses too;
You fail'd, Sir: therefore now you turn,
To fall on those who are to you,
As Captain is to Subaltern.

But men of long-enduring hopes,
And careless what this hour may bring,
Can pardon little would-be Popes
And Brummels, when they try to sting.

An artist, Sir, should rest in Art,
And waive a little of his claim;
To have the deep Poetic heart
Is more than all poetic fame.

But you, Sir, you are hard to please;
You never look but half content:
Nor like a gentleman at ease,
With moral breadth of temperament.

And what with spites and what with fears,
You cannot let a body be:
It's always ringing in your ears,
"They call this man as good as *me*."

What profits now to understand
The merits of a spotless shirt—
A dapper boot—a little hand—
If half the little soul is dirt?

You talk of tinsel! why, we see
The old mark of rouge upon your cheeks.
You prate of Nature! you are he
That spilt his life about the cliques.

A Timon you! Nay, nay, for shame:
It looks too arrogant a jest—
The fierce old man—to take *his* name,
You bandbox. Off, and let him rest.

The full force of Tennyson's satire will never be appreciated save by the few; for it is the few only who will have either the leisure or the courage to wade through the work which suggested it. The poet himself never republished the piece. It is not to be found in any authorized edition of his writings; which is one main reason for reprinting it here. He further disclaimed all responsibility for its publication at the time. "I never sent my lines to *Punch*," he wrote. "John Forster did. They were too bitter. I do not think that I should ever have published them." However they got there, it is manifest that Tennyson speedily regretted the printing of them, perhaps the writing of them. In the next number of 'Punch'

indeed appeared a short piece of his which expressed his real sentiments after he had recovered from his temporary indignation. It bore the same signature of Alcibiades and was entitled 'Afterthoughts.' In modern editions of the poet it is found under the heading of 'Literary Squabbles.' In this he appeared to express a sense of shame for having been betrayed into taking notice of the unprovoked attack to which he had been subjected. Such undoubtedly were the feelings he had himself soon come to entertain; but to the reader he will seem to have followed the wisest and properest course to vindicate his own reputation and to protect himself from future assaults of a similar character. The trenchant lines he then wrote were unquestionably a main if not the main agency in causing the suppression of the offensive passages about himself; and it announced in unmistakable terms to the whole tribe of depreciators that it would not be satisfactory to their present peace of mind or to their future reputation to presume too far upon the patience of School-miss Alfred. To be safe from contempt, they must either be careful to hide their names or wait till the object of their attack was dead.

Whatever may have been the nature of the reconciliation between the two men, it is plain that Bulwer's real feelings at this particular period of his life were revealed in the lines he was forced to discard. In a later novel he put the views he still cherished in the mouth of one of his favorite characters. In it Colonel Morley is represented as cursing the critics for having praised the verses of a certain imaginary poet who

was dead. His words really express Bulwer's poetic creed, and the faith he accepted did not include Tennyson. The work of this assumed dead author, Colonel Morley declared he had failed to read, not because it was below contempt, but because it was above comprehension. "All poetry," says he, "praised by critics nowadays is as hard to understand as a hieroglyphic. I own a weakness for Pope and common sense. I could keep up with our age as far as Byron; but after him I was thrown out. However, Arthur was declared by the critics to be a great improvement on Byron!—more 'poetical in form'—more 'æsthetically artistic'—more 'objective' or 'subjective' (I am sure I forget which, but it was one or the other, nonsensical, and not English) in his views of man and nature. Very possibly. All I know is—I bought the poems, but could not read them; the critics read them, but did not buy."[1] This was far from an exact representation of the sale of Tennyson's writings, but it was of Bulwer's feelings at the time about his great contemporary. This attitude he continued to hold long after and perhaps never abandoned. To a visitor at Knebsworth in 1861, he said that he could not read Tennyson.

[1] 'What Will He Do with It,' 1859, Vol. III, p. 133.

CHAPTER XX

THE PRINCESS

On the seventeenth of December, 1847, London daily papers announced in their advertising columns the appearance "in a few days" of a new poem by Tennyson entitled 'The Princess.' On Saturday, the twenty-fifth of the same month, came the further announcement that it was that day published. The work had been for some time in preparation. In May, 1845, FitzGerald had met Tennyson in London. "He was looking well and in good spirits," he wrote to Frederick Tennyson, "and had got two hundred lines of a new poem in a butcher's book."[1] This is one of the earlier notices of the poet's being actually engaged on the work he was contemplating.

The estimate which had now come to be taken of Tennyson by the educated class, and the interest with which anything from his pen was looked for, are evinced by the fact that talk about the expected poem began in literary circles almost as soon as it was known to be in course of preparation. The reports which sprang up in regard to it and continued even to the date of its publication bore generally only a remote resemblance to the truth. A peculiarly fantastic one,

[1] Letter of June 12, 1845, in FitzGerald's 'Letters and Literary Remains,' Vol. I, p. 154.

learned from her brother, was communicated to her future husband by Miss Barrett nearly two years before the work appeared. At the very end of January, 1846, she wrote to Browning that Tennyson was seriously ill with an internal complaint and confined to his bed, as George hears from a common friend. "Which," she added, "does not prevent his writing a new poem—he has finished the second book of it—and it is in blank verse and a fairy tale, and is called the 'University,' the university-members being all females." Miss Barrett was as much puzzled by the character of this news as Tennyson would have been himself. "I don't know what to think—," she added; "it makes me open my eyes."

Rumors, indeed, many fanciful and some almost grotesque, about the nature of the work and the sentiments expressed in it were prevalent during the years immediately preceding its appearance. Taking into consideration its actual character, perhaps the most extraordinary was that it was marked by peculiar hostility to the female sex. Mary Russell Mitford more than once in her correspondence bears witness to the existence of this impression. In September of 1847, she wrote that she had heard of its being very beautiful, but that it gave a low idea of women. She had previously informed a correspondent that Dyce, whom she described as "a man of consummate taste," had reported the same view in almost the same words. The Dyce here mentioned was doubtless the Shakespearean editor. It is a natural inference from her remark that he had seen the work, but it is probably

an erroneous one; for his description of it precludes the idea of his possessing any real knowledge of its character. This is but one of several mistaken views of it which were pronounced with great positiveness before it came out to confound the utterers. A letter from the younger Hallam gives an account of a visitor in December, 1847,—just on the eve of publication—undertaking to characterize the poem, "his fixed idea being that it was tremendously comic and that the merit turned on the quaint conceits of the plot." It was certainly fortunate for Tennyson that he never attempted to make the reality in any way correspond to this description. He had in certain ways a keen sense of humor, and was often happy in expressing it. He could produce characterizations which entertain us by their quaintness as well as by their accuracy of representation. He further enjoyed the purely comic; but it was as impossible for him to write it as it was for Milton. In all his humor there is a certain high seriousness. Behind its manifestations there is fairly sure to be a grim background. But when he comes to the lighter forms of badinage or persiflage, he is never at home. If any serious fault is to be laid to the charge of 'The Princess,' it is to be found in one or two places where he seems to be aiming after a fashion at that effect.

The work underwent a good deal of revision and alteration during the years which immediately followed its publication. Besides changes in the text of individual lines, these consisted to a slight extent of omissions but mainly of additions. The second

edition indeed, which came out in September, 1848, varied hardly at all from the first. The principal difference between the two consisted of the now prefixed dedication of the poem to Henry Lushington, who was not merely a close personal friend but one of the most trusted of Tennyson's literary advisers. But in the third edition which appeared at the beginning of February, 1850, numerous changes were made. To some extent they took the form of revision, but mainly of additions. These latter necessarily involved more or less of alteration, usually very slight, in the previously accepted text. The six intercalary songs were introduced. They had been in the poet's mind from the outset, but he had decided not to include them, because while deeming them the best interpreters of the poem, he had come to the conclusion that the work would explain itself. When he discovered that the public did not see his drift, which was to make the babe the central figure, he changed his mind. Alterations were also made in the body of the work as well as in the prologue and conclusion. Furthermore, there was then added the interlude which follows Part IV.

Up to the appearance of the third edition, the whole poem had been in blank verse. Even the three songs which from the first it had contained were unrhymed. The introduction of these six intercalary lyrics in this edition was its most important feature so far as its effect upon the public was concerned. It gave the poem an attraction to many who had previously been disposed to look upon it with indifference or had been led by foolish criticism to speak of it with disparage-

ment. For this result there was ample reason. Effective as Tennyson was in blank verse—never more so than in 'The Princess'—it was his lyric gift that above everything else made him the favorite of the public which he became. Few are the men who have the leisure, even if they have the desire to familiarize themselves with even the greatest of long poems; fewer still have the mental equipment to recognize the consummate perfection of treatment in which part is made to answer to part, the skill with which the incidents are marshalled so as to lead inevitably to their destined conclusion. All this implies not only high cultivation but takes time and thought. Consequently such works can become favorites of but a limited number. But a lyric appeals to all. Its sentiment will be felt by the humblest who is perhaps unable to appreciate the exquisite delicacy of workmanship which impresses itself upon the intellectually highest. In consequence these six intercalary lyrics were at once circulated far and wide. As naturally they were made the subject of constant comment and critical judgment. A collection of the various and varying estimates put by different readers on their respective merits would be one of the curiosities of criticism, if any particular criticism, no matter what its character, is entitled to be called curious. Each of these lyrics had its partisans. The general voice apparently favored the bugle song which had been suggested by the echoes heard by Tennyson on Lake Killarney. To many what seemed the most effective of them all was the one beginning "Ask me no more,"

indicating the final surrender of the Princess to the feelings against which she had been struggling.

The fourth edition which followed in April, 1851, was distinguished by the regrettable addition of the "weird seizures" to which the Prince is represented as being subject. Various changes were in consequence rendered necessary. The conclusion, furthermore, was largely rewritten. The little more than half-dozen lines of the original opening were extended to thirty-two. Further on, forty lines were introduced, occasioned by the events which had followed the continental revolution of 1848. There was the usual complacent comparison between the sobriety and law-abiding character of the English as contrasted with the levity of the French. Then followed the fifth edition which was brought out towards the middle of February, 1853. In it are found a number of minor changes; but the only important addition was the fourteen stirring lines of the prologue beginning with the words "O miracle of women." This edition presents us the poem in its final definitive form. Very few and of very slight importance were the changes subsequently made. In consequence of the alterations and additions which it had received, the nearly three thousand lines of which it had originally consisted had been extended to over thirty-three hundred in spite of the omission of some twenty or thirty which had been thrown out in the recast made of the work. Furthermore, not only had about three hundred and fifty lines been added but there had been a modification of the language, especially in the prologue and the epilogue, in the always

hopeless attempt to meet the objections of unintelligent criticism.

So much for the bibliographical details of the work. Now comes the consideration of its history and character. The subject had been in Tennyson's mind long before he undertook the composition of the poem; for it was not until about 1845 that he set seriously about the task of preparation. As early as 1839, he had talked over the plan of the work with her who was later to become his wife. Upon the part woman ought to play in life he had very definite opinions. In this as in many other of his speculations he was as much in advance of his age as to some of those whose cause he then championed he would possibly seem behind now. There is nothing in the work, however, to indicate what was his position on the subjects of controversy to which public attention is at present more specifically directed. But to him the higher education of woman was a social question transcending in importance the great political ones which at that time occupied the thoughts and inflamed the passions of his countrymen. That any mode of education or non-education that tended to restrict her intellectual powers would not only work harm to her but to man also was his firm faith. Naturally he sympathized with every effort put forth to increase the facilities for her fullest development.

In certain ways the adequate treatment of the subject presented peculiar difficulties; especially so at that time. It had its serious side in the actual wrongs

which woman had endured in the past and was continuing to endure in the present. There was a further grievance in the obstacles which were encountered in every effort to remedy these wrongs. Upon all measures in this direction contumely had been regularly poured by hard-headed men who were in general difficult to convince because they were at the same time usually thick-headed. Nothing but abuse had waited upon the arguments of Mary Wollstonecraft in what to modern ears seems her peculiarly temperate statements of the right of her sex to an independent career and activity. On the other hand, loud applause was given even by women themselves to the sentimental slipslop of various pious advisers like, for instance, the Reverend Dr. Fordyce, who in his 'Sermons to Young Women,' assured them that "men of sensibility desire in every woman soft features, a flowing voice, a form not robust, and a demeanour delicate and gentle." Far more endurable to women of sense than this senile maundering about her proper attitude and character is the brutal proclamation of her essential inferiority and heaven-ordained subjection to man which on more than one occasion Milton put forth; never more energetically than in the words he places in Eve's mouth at the beginning of one of the most beautiful passages in 'Paradise Lost.' It is in this way—sufficient of itself to account largely for the unhappiness of Milton's first marriage—that our first mother is represented as addressing Adam:

> My author and disposer, what thou bidd'st
> Unargued I obey. So God ordains:
> God is thy law, thou mine; to know no more
> Is woman's happiest knowledge and her praise.

These words unquestionably represent Milton's attitude upon the relation of the sexes. It is perhaps needless to add that he who sets out to act upon such a view will ordinarily have in no very long time the consideration of the subject of divorce pressed upon his attention, even if he does not write treatises upon it.

Naturally any self-respecting woman would feel outraged at two such representations of her position and aims as those just taken from Fordyce and Milton. She would be more than justified in protesting violently against indignities of this sort placed upon her sex. With these feelings, every intelligent man could sympathize. Unfortunately opposed to the serious side of the subject, there was a ludicrous one; at least to the great majority of the public it seemed ludicrous. This was caused by the hysterical passion with which movements for the elevation of woman had been attended, and the extravagant views and expectations of what not merely could but certainly would be accomplished as a result of her sharing every privilege possessed by man. Hence in order to get a hearing for his own ideas, Tennyson saw that it was necessary to take into account these two conflicting currents of thought and feeling. To effect this purpose he made the work, what he called it, a medley. The narrator is represented as saying that to relate the story

properly it would be necessary to call back him who had told 'The Winter's Tale'; who had mingled in one artistic whole the past and the present, Christian belief and heathen practice; who had brought into the same period of time Puritans singing psalms to horn pipes and messengers dispatched to consult the oracle of Apollo; who had given to Bohemia a seacoast and had placed Delphos on an island; who had made his first heroine queen of the Sicilia of classic times but likewise the daughter of the emperor of Russia; and who in this remote pagan past had introduced sculptures which surpassed the work of the most noted of Raphael's disciples.

All these diverse and conflicting elements Shakespeare had wrought into a whole so harmonious that only the unhappy pedant is disturbed by their appearance. Tennyson had determined to follow his example. If he could not do as well as the great master, he would do as well as he could. The whole scheme of his poem contemplated therefore the jumbling together of the past and the present. Not merely was it intimated, it was directly asserted, that there was to be confusion; that the manners of different periods were to be brought together; that into the modes of thinking, into the moods of feeling, into the activities of the existing everyday world were to be thrust the modes, the moods, the activities of an outworn age. Fullest notice of this intention was given. It was implied in the very wording of the sub-title. For any help afforded by it in conveying the knowledge of it to the mind of the average critic, it might as well have been

left unwritten. Never was greater reluctance to accept a work as the author designed it more pronounced and more violently proclaimed than in the sort of welcome with which 'The Princess' was greeted at its first appearance. Stupid as well as malignant criticism fell to Tennyson's lot during the whole of his career. That is the fate which befalls all great poets. But there was a peculiar obtuseness of perception in the immediate contemporary notices of the work in question that exceeded the justifiable inability to appreciate which we accord to the extremest form of critical inanity.

If Tennyson had expected to secure himself from attack by proclaiming his poem to be, what it was, a medley, he evinced little knowledge of the methods followed by no small number of the reviewing fraternity. There are men who can never be satisfied with letting a great artist do his work in his own way. He must do it in accordance with some theory of their own of what it ought to be and how it ought to be done. In the opinion of these men, persons with the views the characters in this poem are represented as holding were under obligation to conduct themselves in exact consonance with the proprieties observed in modern life. As according to the framework of the poem, they manifestly could not do it, as they certainly did not do it, the feelings of these sticklers for conventional manners were distinctly outraged. They objected stoutly to Tennyson's course in creating a world whose dwellers did not act in conformity to the rules of etiquette which prevailed in the society of the

nineteenth century. From the purely literary point of view they were shocked at his temerity in making the work a medley. This attitude was particularly noticeable in the reviews which appeared in the literary weeklies. These were naturally the first in the field. With only one exception among the more important of these periodicals—the article by John Forster in 'The Examiner'—their verdict was distinctly unfavorable as a whole. In general, it ranged all the way from semi-approval to positive condemnation. Something of this feeling continued to manifest itself even after critics had had time enough to gather their wits together sufficiently to understand what the author was aiming at. But even then they could not repress the desire that Tennyson should have done something else. One reviewer who admitted that in this poem Tennyson had pleaded the rights of women "with a force and an eloquence which the world has scarcely witnessed before," nevertheless confessed his disappointment in its character. He had hoped and even anticipated from its title that it would be "some wild and stirring tale of the old heroic time, or, more likely still— . . . some story wondrous, but poetical withal."[1]

Fortunately for these men, their criticisms have long been buried in the pages of forgotten or no longer read periodicals; and the only reason for raking them now out of their dreary graves, is to make conspicuous the crass lack of appreciation with which Tennyson had to contend before his reputation had become

1 'Eclectic Review,' April, 1848, Vol. XXIII (New Series), p. 415.

so predominant that the most foolish and foolhardy of even anonymous assailants hardly ventured to attack him directly, but was forced to content himself with insinuating depreciation. But that day had not then dawned. It is accordingly worth while to collect from reviews found in periodicals then existing a few expressions of opinion to denote the sort of welcome which the poem received at the outset from the professed leaders of public opinion. There was, of course, the general employment of the formula which has regularly characterized feeble criticism from a remote and even indefinite past, that the work under consideration would have been improved by care and condensation. Omission and revision might lead closely, at least, to that high and perfect excellence clearly comprehended by the keen vision of the reviewer, but not as yet discerned by the writer. But it was not so much to the length of the production as to its character that exception was taken. The cry arose at once on every side, Why had not Tennyson done something else? There was a general conviction expressed that he had been guilty of the grossest impropriety. An essentially correct idea of the twaddle, calling itself criticism, which fairly ran rampant for the weeks immediately following the publication of the poem, may be gained from a few illustrative citations.

You are mixing up, said one, the manners of the past and the present. The different parts refuse to amalgamate with one another, said a second. The familiar and the conventional are out of keeping with

the earnestness of the ideal, said a third. Lecture rooms and chivalric lists, modern pedantry and ancient romance, Tennyson was told, are antagonisms which no art can reconcile. You are uniting in one piece the grave and the burlesque. The ideal and the literal are constantly intermixed. The union of banter and fancy, of the serious and the satiric, is highly improper. These very phrases, and numerous others just as silly, are found in the leading literary weeklies of the time. The obvious fact that all this had been done intentionally, and that this intention had been proclaimed at the outset, did dawn at last upon the mind of some of the reviewers. But that proved no benefit to the author. He could not escape from responsibility by calling his poem a medley. He had chosen to misapply his powers. The point was insisted upon strongly that the poet had no right to compose works of this character. The consciousness of having selected an eccentric plan could not fairly be held to excuse it. One critic, when the fact finally forced itself upon his attention that all his exceptions had been anticipated by the author himself, calmly took the position that the prologue explaining the origin and character of the work was really an apologetic supplement. He derived great satisfaction from this assumption. "There is hope," he remarked, "that an error spontaneously discerned and confessed will in future be avoided."

One marked exception there was to this almost universal disparagement, or at best cold approbation,

which the poem at first received. It came from 'Howitt's Journal."[1] This was a periodical of repute indeed, though of comparatively small circulation. It praised both the idea of the work and its execution. It hailed Tennyson as the poet of progress; and there is no question that in regard to the rights and true social position of woman he was far in advance of the men of his day. The article was almost certainly the work of Mary Howitt; at least it represented accurately the sentiments she entertained. But her views, regarded then as extreme, would little suit those who are persuaded that the salvation of humanity lies in the possession of suffrage. "Everything," she said of her sex, "which is necessary to develop her powers, to perfect her nature, to establish her independence as a reasonable creature . . . must be secured for her." This involved not only the wife standing on an equal footing with her husband before the law, but the possession of equal property rights. There, however, she stopped. On every attempt to turn woman into "a hard, bold, public and prating she-man," as she expressed it, she looked with aversion. Accordingly, she celebrated the "perfect instinct" of the poet, "true to nature and common sense." He had shown in his poem the "inevitable tendency and results of the doctrines of those who, to enfranchise woman, would unwoman her." Then she quoted from it an extract, in which, according to her the true philosophy of the question was given, "clear, simple, strong and

[1] Vol. III, p. 28.

irrefragable." This is the passage beginning with the line,

The woman's cause is man's.

The words which follow have an interest of their own because they very certainly represented Tennyson's view of the relation of the sexes.

But favorable notices of the work, involving comprehension not only of its workmanship but of its purport, were exceedingly rare at the outset. Unintelligent criticism there was in abundance. By the periodicals having then the largest circulation and naturally the most influence, the work was generally termed a failure. This view was not limited to such as from the beginning had looked upon Tennyson's production with ill-concealed dislike. It was conceded with apparent reluctance by some who, after a fashion, professed admiration for it and perhaps felt for it a lukewarm regard which they in all honesty mistook for that feeling. With his usual sensitiveness to criticism Tennyson was a good deal distressed by the hostile reception which the work met at the very outset. In moments of depression, he expressed himself as inclined to abandon any further writing of poetry. Later indeed he is said to have felt regret that he did not connect the subject with some stronger and more serious framework than what he called a medley.[1] If so, the regret was very needless; for at the time of its production a framework of the sort he chose was much the most effective for the end he had

[1] F. W. Farrar's 'Men I have Known,' 1897, p. 19.

in view. He was dealing with what was to him a serious theme; and to most men of that day it was not serious. If, however, the adverse criticism troubled him at first, it could not have troubled him long, as it ought not to have troubled him at all. The hostility of anonymous reviewers, whose opinions, if their names were known, it would have seemed peculiarly absurd to heed, were soon forgotten in the welcome which the work received from the great body of cultivated men.

Tennyson himself seems to have been as little aware as were the majority of the early critics of 'The Princess' of the change which had taken place in his position from the time when he had made his first appearance as an author. The sort of hostility which might have brought about an adverse reception of a little-known poet, such as he was in 1832, would have the slightest possible effect upon the fortunes of one whose reputation was now solidly established. It very speedily became evident that he had now gained an audience that evinced not the slightest disposition to take the opinion of his productions from the hasty examination of men engaged under pressure in the weekly task of applause or condemnation. In all great work the sense of its greatness grows upon readers, the more time they have to make themselves familiar with it. Accordingly the commendation of even the exceedingly few who had been outspoken in their praise at the beginning seemed very faint when contrasted with the fervid eulogies which later came to appear.

As weeks went on the appreciation of the poem advanced not only steadily but rapidly. With its growing popularity naturally went along its increasing sale. The detractors who had been specially vociferous when the book made its first appearance were in no short time reduced to silence if not to repentance. The general interest in it and admiration for it, with the consequent familiarity with it which followed, are made manifest by the number of lines and phrases which have been contributed from it to our stock of common quotations. This is no necessary proof of the excellence of a work; but it is a conclusive one as to its popularity. The general approbation the poem met soon showed itself in the changed tone of the critical press. It is very noticeable in the case of this publication that the longer the reviews of it were delayed, the more cordial and appreciative they were. When the shock produced by the unexpected character of the work had been dissipated, the exceeding foolishness of the early hostile notices of it struck men forcibly. In more than one instance, attempts were made in the later criticisms to correct the unintelligent misapprehensions which had characterized the earlier. Their complete misunderstanding of the nature and intention of the poem was brought out distinctly. Accordingly, with the progress of time the contemporary praise of 'The Princess' was more and more loudly expressed. It may be said to have culminated in Aubrey de Vere's review in the 'Edinburgh,'[1] in which excessive laudation of the work as a whole

[1] Vol. XC, p. 388, October, 1849.

was mingled with the scantiest measure of criticism of details; and again in the enthusiastic eulogy which Charles Kingsley paid it about a year later in 'Fraser's Magazine."[1]

These later reviews had done indeed little more than record what had come to be the opinion of the educated public. This had declared itself unmistakably in the reception given to the poem. In its case, Tennyson's frequent, one might almost call it his regular, experience had been repeated. This was the cool reception of any new work of his, if not its actual condemnation, by the great body of its early critics, and its enthusiastic welcome and constantly increasing appreciation by the great body of cultivated readers. As in so many other instances the public was altogether wiser than those who assumed to advise it. The number of copies of the first edition has been given as two thousand;[2] but the poet's reputation was now so firmly established that this number must have been exceeded in those which were later put upon the market. The dates of the successive editions bear convincing witness to the steadily growing popularity of the work. Indeed, Charles Kingsley in his review of Tennyson's poetry in 1850, while giving enthusiastic praise to 'The Princess,' forbore to make many quotations from it on the avowed ground that such a course was unnecessary because the poem was already familiar to every one.

[1] Vol. XLII, p. 245, September, 1850.
[2] Wise's 'Bibliography of the Writings of Alfred, Lord Tennyson,' Vol. I, p. 100.

Singular, indeed, and altogether exaggerated tributes to the greatness of the poem came, too, from quarters where naturally they would seem little to be expected. One in particular was from the Praeraphaelite circle. Students of literature come to be fairly familiar with the critical vagaries of eminent men of letters, their ability to find exquisite pleasure in what the rest of the world finds unendurable, and the height to which they carry their enthusiasm for works which appear to others merely excellent. It is well known that it was only in the Praeraphaelite circle that Browning found approvers and applauders in the days of his obscuration after the publication of his 'Sordello.' Unpopular and unread everywhere else, his works were hailed by them as of highest value and significance. In his diary under date of December 8, 1849, William Rossetti reports a conversation between his brother and the sculptor and poet, Woolner. The conclusion at which they aimed manifestly struck him as bordering on the treasonable. "Woolner," he tells us, "came in the evening, when Gabriel read *The Princess* through to him, and both of them pronounced it the finest poem since Shakespeare, superior even to *Sordello.*" The veteran student of literature becomes so hardened to the numerous works which have been pronounced by competent judges the finest since Shakespeare that this particular commendation is not likely of itself to make any special impression. It is the concluding clause, "superior even to *Sordello,*" that brings surprise and delight. But to the reporter of the con-

versation it brought pain. The younger Rossetti tells us he could not agree with the wild ebullition of enthusiasm which reckoned 'The Princess' superior even to 'Sordello.' "To the latter opinion," he added, "I demur."[1]

Reluctant testimony to the favor the poem had met with, had been borne shortly after its publication by FitzGerald, who had now begun to take up the rôle which he never laid aside, of mourning over the failure of Tennyson to reach some lofty but unnamed ideal, which he himself professed to have in mind but never clearly outlined. In a letter of May, 1848, to Frederick Tennyson, he expressed his dissatisfaction with the poem; but he admitted that he was singular in his opinion. "I am considered," he added, "a great heretic for abusing it; it seems to me a wretched waste of power at a time of life when a man ought to be doing his best; and I almost feel hopeless about Alfred now. I mean, about his doing what he was born to do." As these words prove, FitzGerald was not satisfied with the work. He indeed was not satisfied with anything that Tennyson wrote after the appearance of the volumes of 1842. In his opinion, everything which came out subsequently indicated a falling-off. Somehow the poet had failed to fulfil his early promise. Exactly what he desired his friend to do, it is no easy matter to make out. Had he been called upon to define it himself in precise terms, he would in all probability have abandoned the task in despair. At any rate if it were clear to his own mind, he never made it clear

[1] 'Praeraphaelite Diaries,' edited by W. M. Rossetti, p. 236.

to the mind of any one else. Tennyson manifestly could never have satisfied him. What he wanted him to do, whatever it was, was always something different from what he did do. 'The Princess' did not suit him. 'In Memoriam' did not suit him. 'Maud' did not suit him. Both Carlyle and himself, he said, gave the poet up after the production of 'The Princess.'

The opinions of two men of genius, but peculiarly crotchety in their notions, are of not much real significance. FitzGerald in particular was a man of curious tastes and prejudices, of curious likes and dislikes. He rated Frederick Tennyson as being almost as great a poet as Alfred. He could not endure Jane Austen. He could not read George Eliot. With Browning in particular, he had no patience whatever, and even less, were that possible, with the men who were chanting his praises. "I abuse Browning myself," he wrote to Tennyson late in 1867, "and get others to abuse him; and write to you about it; for the sake of easing my own heart—not yours. Why is it . . . that, while the Magazine critics are belauding him, *not one* of the men I know, who are not inferior to the writers in the Athenæum, Edinburgh, etc. can *endure,* and (for the most part) can read him at all?" Then he went on to quote the opinions of Cowell, Thompson, Donne, and Carlyle. Even Pollock himself, who was a great friend of Browning, admitted that he could not succeed in getting through 'The Ring and the Book,' though he had tried to do so three times. Accordingly, he pretended to have read it and let the poet so suppose.

"Who then," continued FitzGerald, "are the people that write the nonsense in the Reviews?"[1]

FitzGerald's estimates of English poetry and poets were certainly never of the conventional sort. They make his belief in his own critical insight more a matter of curiosity than of trust. He had little admiration for Shelley. "What a fuss," he wrote, "the cockneys make about Shelley just now, surely not worth Keats' little finger."[2] Swinburne met with no favor in his eyes. Matthew Arnold he set down as "a pedant." "Is Mr. Rossetti a Great Poet like Browning and Morris?" he wrote. "So the *Athenæum* tells me. Dear me, how thick Great Poets *do* grow nowadays." On the other hand he clung to Crabbe with a devotion almost pathetic after that author had become to the rest of the world, save the special student of literature, little more than a name. Still, though he professed himself disappointed in Tennyson's not having accomplished the work, whatever that was, he was appointed to do, he never abandoned his faith in him as the greatest genius of his generation. The regard which existed between him and the Paltry Poet, as he was wont to designate him in the letters he wrote to Tennyson's wife, never knew abatement. It must always be a matter of regret that he did not live to read the affectionate dedication to himself of the volume entitled 'Tiresias,' which his own sudden death snatched from his sight just as it was on the point of coming out.

[1] 'Tennyson and his Friends,' p. 118, article by Dr. Warren, President of Magdalen.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 121, article by Dr. Warren.

There is, however, no question that there was agreement in other quarters with FitzGerald's general view; though, had it come to specific detail, there would have been wide dissent. It is a striking illustration of the hold that Tennyson had already gained over the minds of men that so many were eager to point out to him the precise path it was his duty to follow. One persistent demand was made upon him by the critical fraternity that he should set out to produce some one great work, apparently some bulky work. Even Spedding, the sagest of all his friends, in his review of the 'Poems' of 1842, pressed upon him the necessity of concentrating his energies upon a production of this character. Exactly what his advisers had in mind was indeed left very vague. The review of 'The Princess' in 'The Examiner'—pretty certainly the work of John Forster—was about the only early article in the influential weekly critical press of that time which was outspoken in its praise. Yet the critic, while conceding the poem to be a great advance upon the previous productions of its author, complained that it was not great enough. Why did he not do something else? The "set," he was told, whose tastes and preferences he was too much in the habit of consulting, was not the world for which he should be writing. It soon became manifest that this set embraced about all the world whose opinions were worth heeding.

Why, further, said the critic, does not Tennyson assume his mission? Why had he discredited it with trifling and unworthy puerilities? "Mission" was the burden under which the unfortunate poet of those

days was compelled to stagger, just as now he is under the necessity of bearing a "message." Tennyson's mission, so far as it can be made out from the somewhat obscure utterances of the time, was to write a big book, a solemn book, in which there should be no grafting of the burlesque upon the serious, a book which all critics would agree in mentioning with respect if not with praise, and which all persons really fond of poetry would carefully avoid reading. To advice of this sort Tennyson then turned a deaf ear. He wrote much, and in many measures, and on many subjects. But he must have been aware—if he was not, other men were—that he was pre-eminently a lyric poet. As a lyric poet he will always be best and most permanently known. Lyric productions, furthermore, have the advantage of being comparatively brief. Long poems will, without doubt, always continue to be written; seldom will they become familiar to many. The instances are rare in which a single one of them will reach more than a limited circle of readers. Even to the majority of these it will not appeal for more than a limited time. There are those who think it will deserve that fate only. Few certainly there are who would not gladly exchange whole books of 'The Excursion' for three comparatively short pieces equal to the 'Lines on Tintern Abbey,' 'Laodamia' and the 'Ode on the Intimations of Immortality.'

Besides writing a work, the matter and manner of which did not conform to the preconceptions of his early critics and which did not suit what they called

their taste, and incidentally failing to fulfil his mission, there was in their eyes a still further grievance. In this work, Tennyson had made some daring experiments in meter. Certain of them he himself may in time have been led to regard as too daring. He had been a careful student of blank verse, and had come to feel that in order to have it produce its proper effect, the monotony of the regularly recurring rhythm must be varied, so far as the measure would permit. It is manifest to any serious student of the poet's writings that all these variations from the normal were made designedly. They were made, too, with that consummate mastery of versification which Tennyson invariably manifested. But to the critics who counted syllables, to whom any violation of exactitude was a crime, his disregard of conventional rules was an unforgivable offence. It was generally agreed that either the poet could not scan, or that he considered himself too great a person to adapt his verses to any such requirement. The latter was the general view. Accordingly, he was solemnly warned that correct monotony is less displeasing than awkward and unnecessary license.

As a matter of fact, much of Tennyson's finest metrical workmanship is found in 'The Princess.' Such was his own opinion. "Some of the blank verse in this poem is among the best I ever wrote," he said later. But these daring experiments in versification annoyed and confounded, or rather outraged his early critics. They gave unmeasured vent to their dissatisfaction. They spoke of them as exhibiting not liberty

but license. "False and deficient quantities," said one of the London literary weeklies, "occur with a frequency which suggest that they have been deliberately adopted." "The merest mechanics of verse-making are frequently disregarded," said another. Then it proceeded to quote a passage as prose which it said might be broken up into lines but could not be turned into verse. This obstacle more intelligent readers have succeeded in overcoming. "There is," said one of the silliest of these early reviews, "a total indifference to the artistical rules of verse or the commonest semblance of poetry, which not only prevents all choice or charm of manner supplying some of the defects of matter and subject, but continually repels the reader unless when it excites his surprise." Such was the general tone of much of the early criticism which occasionally extended even to later. It never evidently occurred to any of these writers that a man who was a great poet might possibly understand the nature of the vehicle he employed as well as those who could not attain to the dignity of being even small poets; indeed might even understand it better.

All views of this sort died out finally with the progress of intelligence; but at the time itself the only defence of Tennyson's practice which has fallen under my own observation came out in an American review of the poem.[1] This was the work of Professor Hadley, whose comparatively early death was one of the greatest losses which scholarship in this country has

[1] 'New Englander,' Vol. VII, p. 193, May, 1849.

ever been compelled to suffer. Hadley pointed out the extraordinary pains that had been taken in the construction of the verse, and the skill with which this had been accomplished. He spoke in detail of Tennyson's bold adoption of rhythmical and metrical expedients which had once been in regular use, but had now come to be discredited by the finical taste of later times. For this freedom, stigmatized as license, had been substituted a passion for monotonous uniformity. From this servility to mere form the poet had broken away. Among the various instances of this revolt from modern punctiliousness he specified the occurrence in the line of syllables beyond the orthodox number: the substitution of a trochaic foot for an iambic; the blending of the final vowel of one word with the initial syllable of the one following, especially when the latter begins with a vowel or weak consonant, or rather its rapid pronunciation so that the foot was apparently not lengthened. As a result of this last proceeding, a short syllable was sometimes treated as if it formed no place in the meter, and a dissyllable was in consequence converted into a monosyllable.

In America the edition of 'The Princess' was brought out in February, 1848, nearly two months after its appearance in England.[1] Nowhere have I

[1] In his journal under date of January 25, 1848, Longfellow tells us that he "found Fields correcting the proofs of the second edition of Tennyson's Princess, the first, one thousand copies, having been sold within a few weeks" ('Life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow,' Vol. II, p. 109). This is somewhat inexplicable. According to all other testimony there is no record of the publication of the work in this country before the middle of February, and the first American edition bears the date of 1848. For one proof out of many, the Boston correspondent

been able to discover in the critical literature of this country anything resembling the hostile attitude assumed towards the poem by the English weekly press on its publication. The commendation in certain instances was more or less half-hearted, but there must have been but little outspoken condemnation. Of course, there prevailed also a certain amount of the usual perfunctory criticism. Especially was this to be found in the quarters where still lingered the habit of re-echoing the opinion expressed in England. The various and varying sentiments entertained by admirers and censurers can be found adequately represented in a dialogue between three different imaginary characters, written by Charles Astor Bristed and entitled 'A Talk about the Princess.'[1] There is in this article another one of those singular literary prophecies which rise up constantly to confound those who are disposed to put their faith in the predictions of critics. The man who was soon to become the most popular poet of the century in all English-speaking lands, we are told here, was then and always is to be "caviare to the general." Even at the time this view would hardly be borne out by a good deal of the criticism which the work had already everywhere received. There was indeed expressed on

of 'The New York Literary World,' under date of February 5, announces as the most remarkable event of the year that a new poem by Tennyson was soon to appear, called 'The Princess.' He had been privileged to see the proof sheets and from the work he quoted a number of passages. Furthermore, it was not until the number of the 'Literary World' for February 26 that Ticknor advertised the poem as having just been published. Longfellow apparently must have been told of some new edition of the 'Poems' previously published.

[1] 'The American Review, a Whig Journal,' for July, 1848.

this side of the Atlantic in several quarters a degree of praise for the poem which might justly be called extravagant even by its warmest admirers. It is evident that by this time Tennyson had gained a body of enthusiastic partisans in this country.

There is remarkable proof of this in one American criticism, which is worthy of special mention. It came from James Russell Lowell and is found in 'The Massachusetts Quarterly Review,' a periodical which flourished from 1848 to 1850.[1] As it appeared in a publication which had but a short life, as it has never been included in any reprint of Lowell's works, and is practically no longer accessible to most readers, it is worth while to give a fairly faithful summary of its contents; for it represents very accurately the feelings which had now come to prevail among the young and ardent partisans of the poet, and in particular the contemptuous attitude they had begun to assume towards his decriers. The opening part of it was according to all appearance aimed at the critical comment which had been published in the London literary weeklies; for there is very little to be found in the notices the work received on this side of the Atlantic to deserve the censure to which Lowell gave utterance. His words are further noticeable because the writer came to be somewhat critical of Tennyson, as his own life drew to a close. In Lowell's opinion the poet's later production did not stand on as high a level of achievement as his earlier. It will perhaps be conceded by the majority of his most fervent

[1] Vol. I, pp. 256-259, March, 1848.

admirers that with a few magnificent exceptions, what Tennyson wrote after the age of fifty did not come up to what he wrote during his first thirty years of authorship.

Lowell opened his review of this "delicious poem," as at the end he styled it, with contemptuous remarks upon those who had decried it. He had heard, he said, that Timms had pronounced it an entire failure. Timms, he added, is the man who protects his fellow citizens from being too easily pleased. He has a battery erected, mounted with what he calls the received canons of criticism; is familiar with all schools of poetry and looks at them from the same point of view. The public, he thought, had a curious predilection for having its opinions made up for it by the Timmses. This is perhaps true, at least for a time in the case of unknown authors; but it will hardly hold good of those of them who have already achieved reputation. At all events, it is manifest that in this instance Lowell was very far from sharing in the opinion which he had ascribed to Timms. Nowhere can there be found in contemporary, or for that matter, in later criticism, a more glowing tribute to the excellence of both poem and poet. "We read the book through," he wrote, "with a pleasure which heightened to unqualified delight, and ended in admiration. The poem is unique in conception and execution. It is one of the few instances in literature where a book is so true to the idiosyncrasy of its author that we cannot conceive of the possibility of its being written by any other person, no matter how gifted."

Lowell further added a remark to the effect that the very excellence of Tennyson's workmanship had to a certain extent led to the depreciation of it, or, at any rate, to the lack of appreciation. "His conception is always clear," he said, "his means exactly adequate, and his finish perfect. So entirely free is he from any appearance of effort, that many have been led to underrate him, and to praise his delicacy at the expense of his strength." All of Lowell's review was in keeping with these preliminary criticisms. Indeed he may almost be said to have rivalled Poe in the degree of praise he gave to the poet. "Perfection of form," was his conclusion, "seems to be with him a natural instinct, not an attainment." "We must therefore regard 'The Princess,' " he went on to say, "as the work of a master, and it must argue a poverty in ourselves, if we cannot see it as a harmonious whole. For so perfect is Tennyson's appreciation of his own strength, that he has never in a single instance fallen below himself. His self-command is not the least wonderful quality in him." Lowell was especially struck by his profound and delicate comprehension of female character as shown in the poem. One result of it, he pointed out, was the gradual absorption of the writer in his subject, the growing predominance of the poet over the mere story-teller, as the higher relations existing between his characters appealed to him, and the creative faculty felt itself more and more tasked.

It has been worth while to give a full account of the early derogatory contemporary criticism, not so much

because it is occasionally echoed at the present day, but because it exemplifies the state of mind with which any great work of art is approached by a certain class of persons, if it presents anything novel in its plan or treatment. The one thing that shocks these critics above everything else is originality. They have formed for themselves certain canons by which to judge the works brought to their consideration. If any production fails to conform to these, it never occurs to them that it is not the work under examination which is at fault but the canons they have adopted. We have had occasion to see that the history of this poem shows how speedily the verdict of the general public of the cultivated class overrode the unfavorable pronouncements of its earliest critics. The reason is obvious. In certain ways 'The Princess' is one of the most perfect of Tennyson's works. This is not to say that it is highest in aim or noblest in subject, though both aim and subject are high and noble. But in variety of interest, in the due proportion of means to ends, in the marvellous adaptation of treatment of the varying conditions of the subject-matter, never degenerating into the purely burlesque, never straining beyond the legitimate expression of high-wrought feeling—and both these temptations beset the poet constantly—he has succeeded in producing within its limitations what might in justice be called a nearly perfect work of art.

It is observable, as suggested by Lowell, that, as the action proceeds, whatever there is of mock-heroic in the character of the heroine or of the story itself,

fades more and more into the background as the play of the great elemental forces which control the lives of all of us becomes predominant. Inevitably, perhaps unconsciously, the voice of the poet assumes a loftier tone as his high conception of the true relation of the sexes reveals itself with distincter clearness to his mental vision. This more and more absorbed his thoughts and feelings as he proceeded in the narration of the story, and gradually changed the character of the work from its original intention. He himself recognized the fact and acknowledged it in the conclusion. In the original version, he said,

> Here closed our compound story which at first
> Had only meant to banter little maids
> With mock-heroics and with parody;
> But slipt in some strange way, crost with burlesque,
> From mock to earnest, even into tones
> Of tragic.

All this was changed in the third edition of 1850. In that the poet dilated still further upon the fact of this transition from the mock to the real heroic. Incidentally, too, he revealed his own sensitiveness to the criticism of which he had been made the subject. As the conclusion now stands, the words read as follows:

> What style could suit?
> The men required that I should give throughout
> The sort of mock-heroic gigantesque,
> With which we banter'd little Lilia first:
> The women—and perhaps they felt their power,
> For something in the ballads which they sang,
> Or in their silent influence as they sat,

Had ever seem'd to wrestle with burlesque,
And drove us, last, to quite a solemn close—
They hated banter, wish'd for something real,
A gallant fight, a noble princess—why
Not make her true-heroic—true-sublime?
Or all, they said, as earnest as the close?
Which yet with such a framework scarce could be.
Then rose a little feud betwixt the two,
Betwixt the mockers and the realists:
And I, betwixt them both, to please them both,
And yet to give the story as it rose,
I moved as in a strange diagonal,
And maybe neither pleased myself nor them.

The one serious defect in the poem is the essentially uninteresting character of the Prince. We do not expect indeed in the hero of a tale, who is also its narrator, a proclamation, still less an exaltation of the heroic in his own nature. Still, to make him an object of regard for the reader there should be a suggestion of its possibility. Mild and amiable he is represented as being, with not merely correct but noble sentiments, and with fullest devotion to the woman whom he has never seen but to whom he has been proxy-wedded. Furthermore, we can concede him the fullest sympathy with the ends at which his destined bride aims, though not sharing her belief in the means to attain it or in the proper relation of the sexes. But everywhere in the poem is left on the reader's mind the feeling that there is something lacking in the character—the impression of a certain gentleness, tending to degenerate into feebleness, the attitude of a love-sick boy, not that of a strong, earnest, and

determined man. The Prince is not ignobly weak, but still he is weak; and the sense of his weakness is rendered more emphatic by its contrast with the strength and loftiness of the nature of the Princess, who with all her errors is not only every inch a woman, but every inch a queen. All this was manifest in the poem as it originally appeared; but in the later and definitive form it assumed, it was disagreeably accentuated.

As a general rule, Tennyson's afterthoughts and changes, whether in the shape of omissions or additions, are distinct improvements. There are a few exceptions, and here is one of the few. It was bad enough so to portray the personages of the story that the hero is completely overshadowed by the heroine and one is almost tempted to think poorly of her for falling in love with him at all. The character of the Princess was deservedly a favorite with Tennyson himself. It was doubtless intended that the Prince should not come up to her height. For that matter, as she is depicted, few men would. This, however, can hardly be regarded as a justification for making the inferiority of the hero so pronounced as it was even in the first instance. But not content with having impressed upon the reader's mind at the outset a sense of this inferiority, Tennyson proceeded in the later version of the poem to make the inferiority seem even more inferior by the introduction of a physical defect which conduced still further to his undesirability. To represent him as subject to "weird seizures," as Tennyson did in the fourth and subsequent editions,

was still further to widen the gap which existed between the two originally. It is not likely that the affliction, which the court physician politely murmurs as catalepsy, would recommend a suitor to any woman, least of all to one possessed of so lofty a nature, both mental and physical, as the Princess. Certainly, it does not recommend him to the reader.

One explanation has been given of this addition to the effect that Tennyson himself came more and more to be sensible of the inferiority of the hero to the heroine. Accordingly, he set up the weird seizures as an explanation of the failure of the Prince to reach the height which the Princess occupies without effort. If so, it was an unfortunate expedient to which he resorted; for the characteristic designed to palliate the weakness of the character serves only to aggravate it. Far more likely is it that Tennyson was led to introduce these weird seizures because to a certain extent they were suggested by peculiar experiences of his own. From his boyhood he was subject to what for the lack of a better name he called waking trances. A transcript of these may be found in the ninety-fifth section of 'In Memoriam,' and in the concluding lines of 'The Holy Grail,' in which King Arthur gives his reasons for not taking part in its quest. A prose version of the same mental phenomenon was furnished by Tennyson himself in a letter written in 1874. In it he gave to a correspondent a feeble description, as he said, of a state which in his opinion it was beyond the power of words to represent accurately. "This," he wrote, "has often come upon me through repeating

my own name to myself silently till, all at once, as it were, out of the intensity of the consciousness of individuality the individuality itself seemed to dissolve and fade away into boundless being, and this not a confused state, but the clearest, the surest of the surest, utterly beyond words, where death was an almost laughable impossibility, the loss of personality (if so it were) seeming no extinction, but only the true life.'"[1] All such experience is proper enough for him who leads a contemplative life. Especially is it proper for a poet. To a man of action, however, such as the Prince is designed to be, experiences of this sort are totally unbefitting in circumstances when action is imperatively called for. As a consequence, instead of elevating the character, they tend to lower it.

[1] Letter of May 7, 1874, as cited in John Cuming Walters's 'In Tennyson Land,' p. 38.

CHAPTER XXI

POET LAUREATE

On the twenty-third of April, 1850, Wordsworth died. He had hardly been laid in his grave when discussion sprang up as to who should succeed him as poet laureate. It extended to the desirability of continuing the office. There were those who thought that it was high time that this post, whose duties had now become nominal, should be abolished. Others who were averse to so radical a measure took the ground that its character should be changed. All sorts of propositions indeed were urged in regard to the position. One, for instance, was to the effect that it should be granted for but a single year with the right, however, of reappointment. It was to be continued in the hands of the same holder during what might be called good behavior. The most powerful of the London dailies advocated the abolition of the title altogether.[1] It had become, it said, nothing but a nickname. The emoluments connected with the office should be bestowed upon a deserving man of letters without the ridiculous accompaniment of the bays. "The title," it continued, "is no longer an honour." The phrase "no longer" presents a certain difficulty to the student of literary history. He would be some-

1 'Times,' April 25, 1850.

what at a loss to discover any prolonged period in the past when it was regarded as an honor by any one else than the actual holder. It required, the writer added, the reputation of a Southey or a Wordsworth to carry them without injury to their fame through an office so entirely removed from the ideas and habits of the present time, and which in the past had been frequently rendered disreputable both by the character and the abilities of its holder.

Almost from the beginning, indeed, the office of poet laureate had had a good deal of the time a fairly fatal tendency to fall into contempt. As long as one of its duties was the production of odes for set occasions, this was inevitable; for poetry produced to order is in general one of the most deplorable results of human incapacity. But the degradation of the office had been mainly due to its having been conferred as a reward for party allegiance or political service. After Dryden had been deprived of the position, it was held by a succession of poetical nonentities from the days of Shadwell to those of Pye, the poorness of which is little relieved by the names of Rowe and Warton. Hence the most eminent men were unwilling to accept it. Gray refused it; so did Walter Scott. Southey was willing to take it, for he thought himself as being on the whole the greatest poet of his generation, and accordingly the office was a legitimate tribute to his eminence. He could not bring to the position great poetic ability; but he could and did bring it respectability. His successor, Wordsworth, conferred upon it reputation. Consequently, when he died, no one

seemed to the men of that day fitted to take his place. Hence arose the demand for the abolition of the office altogether or a complete change in its character.

Even before Wordsworth died, there had been occasional talk as to the one likely to be chosen as his successor. Some of the names suggested—then as well as afterwards—sound oddly enough now. Writers were occasionally mentioned—and that, too, by men of intelligence—whom it is hard to conceive as having been thought of by any rational being. One of them was the Quaker poet, Bernard Barton. To him in December, 1846, William Bodham Donne wrote expressing the opinion that if the office became vacant he would be selected for the position. "If the Daddy," he said—Daddy was the name applied to Wordsworth by some of his younger admirers—"was to die, I think you would be made laureate." As the death of Barton took place before that of the holder of the office, his name necessarily did not come up for consideration; but his chances for receiving the position were precisely the same after that event as they would have been before it. Another poet thought of by some, especially those of the older generation, was Henry Taylor. He himself informs us that George Cornwall Lewis, then a member of Lord John Russell's first administration, meeting him after the death of Wordsworth, told him that he had suggested to the prime minister that the laureateship should be offered to him. Lewis was surprised to hear that Tennyson had been under consideration. In his opinion that poet was but little known, and his claims would not be generally

recognized. "Living," wrote Taylor, "amongst the men in London who were the most eminent in literature, he had yet lived so far apart from poetry, that the poet who for some years past had eclipsed every other in popularity was supposed by him to be obscure." After reading the account of this conversation, we hardly need Taylor's further assurance that the mind of Lewis was essentially prosaic.

At the time itself, indeed, any one who had the slightest claim to distinction as a writer of verse was fairly sure to be suggested by somebody. In certain cases it was done with the consent of the person mentioned, in other cases without it. Even the name of that sorry rhymester, Charles Mackay, was brought to the attention of the public. Mackay's earlier excursions in poetry were almost as wretched as his later excursions in philology. But he had the good fortune to have certain of his pieces made generally familiar as songs. In consequence he owed to the music to which his words were set a consideration which never could or would have been given to the words themselves. He, however, in all sincerity believed himself to be a poet, and the success secured for his cheap verses by the agency of another art he attributed to their own inherent excellence. The surprising thing is that others were found at that time to take the same view. Much more deserving of respect was the name of Bryan Waller Procter, better known as Barry Cornwall. He had written some fine lyrics; but he was too well aware of his own limitations to entertain for a moment any thought of his fitness

for the post. Richard Monckton Milnes and Robert Browning are said by later writers to have been suggested also. This may very likely have been the case; though no mention of them has fallen under my own observation in the necessarily limited consultation of the periodical literature of the time.

No attention whatever was paid to these various proposals by the authorities in whom the power of appointment existed. The post was offered in the first place to Rogers. On the eighth of May a letter was written to him by Prince Albert, acting in behalf of the Queen, tendering him the position.[1] One gets the impression that this action seems to have been taken not as a tribute to his poetic eminence, but rather as a recognition of his merit in having lived so long. One of the most perplexing questions with which the modern student of literature has to deal is the vogue which Rogers early attained as a poet and more or less retained during the whole of his long life. His 'Pleasures of Memory,' upon which his reputation mainly rests, is one of the pleasures in which readers of to-day rarely indulge. The acquisition of its original repute is not so hard to understand. It came out in the interval between the decadence of the eighteenth-century poetical school and the great outburst of song which marked the very close of the eighteenth century and the first quarter of the nineteenth. The work originally appeared in 1792. Before the seventh year after its publication had been reached, it had gone through six editions. It was

[1] P. W. Clayden's 'Rogers and his Contemporaries,' Vol. II, p. 352.

reprinted again and again during the first half of the nineteenth century. The succeeding productions of Rogers met with a respectable degree of favor. None of them, however, rivalled in popularity 'The Pleasures of Memory.' But the glamour of his early achievement still continued to hang about the poet and gave a sort of fictitious repute to whatever he later published. Though his best work was far surpassed by many of his contemporaries, the general voice nevertheless accorded him a high position in the ranks of the poetical fraternity. Nor was the lofty opinion entertained of him the opinion of men intellectually inferior. As late as 1830, Macaulay could not refrain from expressing his surprise at the estimation in which Rogers was held, agreeable enough as he considered his writings to be. "That such men," he wrote, "as Lord Granville, Lord Holland, Hobhouse, Lord Byron, and others of high rank in intellect, should place Rogers, as they do, above Southey, Moore and even Scott himself, is what I can not conceive. But this comes of being in the highest society of London. What Lady Jane Granville called the Patronage of Fashion can do as much for a middling poet as for a plain girl like Miss Arabella Falconer."[1]

There were other causes, however, which contributed to the maintenance of the reputation of Rogers. Some of the good opinion entertained of him was due to the generosity displayed by him towards his less fortunate literary brothers. His hand and tongue were always

[1] Macaulay's 'Life and Letters,' Vol. I, p. 198, Letter of June 3, 1831.

at war. He had a habit of saying about contemporary men of letters sharp and at times bitter things. He rarely failed to comment upon their defects of nature or of intellect. But in the times of their distress and pecuniary trouble he was fairly sure to come to their relief. His aid too was always given unostentatiously and as a general rule secretly. Tested by his utterances he would often appear one of the most unamiable not to say malicious of men. Measured by his deeds he was one of the kindest and most generous. This naturally led many of his literary friends to take a peculiarly favorable view of what he had accomplished. Other circumstances there were which contributed to this result besides the reason suggested by Macaulay. At Rogers's house were to be met the men most brilliant in the literary and intellectual world. It was an honor for any young aspirant for distinction in letters to be invited to sit at his table. It was not for the guest at such a gathering to indulge in depreciatory, still less sarcastic, comments upon the poetry of his host. Much rather was he disposed to accord him all the praise his conscience would permit him to utter. It was indeed inevitable that the man of letters just setting forth upon his career should be grateful for the privilege of sitting down at a table where he was surrounded on every side by those who had already attained reputation. It was equally inevitable that he should contribute to any periodical with which he chanced to be connected a more or less flattering opinion of the poet and his work. He would certainly

have no disposition to expose faults and imperfections even if he saw them plainly.

The laureateship indeed seemed almost a perquisite of the literary position to which Rogers had now attained. That it should be offered him partook almost of the nature of necessity. No one seems anywhere to have entered an objection. It is a tribute to his own good sense that he declined it. Even in the most extreme self-estimate he took of himself, the contrast between his own work and that of Wordsworth must have been apparent. What he saw so well, he knew that others would fancy that they could see better. The position afforded tempting opportunities for sarcasm and detraction. He could feel assured that there were those who would only be too glad to avail themselves of them. Furthermore, he was now eighty-seven years old. This gave him a justifiable reason for declining an honor to which in his secret heart he must have felt himself in no wise entitled. Accordingly he pleaded the excuse of age. It seems to have been willingly accepted. By the offer itself due respect had been paid to the oldest survivor of the Georgian era. The filling of the office remained in consequence in abeyance and the claims of the various candidates for the position continued to be warmly pressed, and their qualifications as warmly discussed.

Before the place had been offered to Rogers and declined, there were several other poets, as has been said, who had been suggested as worthy to hold the office. Of some the claims were earnestly pushed either

by themselves or by their friends. One of these men was Leigh Hunt. He had a very respectable band of supporters, nor did he himself pretend to disguise his desire for the honor. In the early part of June, 1850, appeared his autobiography. The discussion of the one who was to be or ought to be the future poet laureate was then going on vigorously in the press. Towards the conclusion of the work, Hunt took up the consideration of his own claims to the position and hinted unmistakably that he would not be averse to accepting it, were it offered. He considered dispassionately the arguments that could be brought in his favor and those that might militate against the bestowal upon him of an office of that character. On the one hand, he had been in the past a sort of volunteer laureate. He had celebrated in verse her Majesty's birthday and also the birthdays of the royal children. To his admiration for the Queen and to the natural loyalty he felt for a female sovereign were to be attributed those effusions of gratitude which had been thought by some to give him a claim to the post. Any such view he disavowed, for, as he observed, gratitude makes no claim.

On the other hand, conditions might be required which it was impossible for him to meet. "I do not mean with regard to poetical qualifications," he said; "for without entering into comparison of myself with others, which neither my modesty nor my pride will allow, it would be an affectation and a falsehood in me to pretend that I do not hold myself to possess them. I venture even to think, and this too, without

any disparagement to court taste, that I should make a better court poet than some who are superior to me in respects not courtly. And sure I am, that in one respect I should make a very rare poet, as far as the world has hitherto seen; for I should write from the heart. I have done so already.'' Then he went on to discuss the political and religious objections which might be brought against conferring the office upon a man holding the opinions he did. His conclusion was that if these opinions had nothing to do with the post, he should rejoice to be thought worthy of it. It is manifest indeed from his remarks that Hunt considered himself the poetical equal of any person who had been named for the position. This desire for it too must have been expressed elsewhere than in this autobiography. There is a reference to the fact in a letter from Mrs. Browning to Miss Mitford. It was written from Florence and dated the fifteenth of June. By that time the work containing the sentiments just quoted could hardly have reached Italy. ''I think,'' Mrs. Browning expressed herself, ''Leigh Hunt should have the Laureateship. He has condescended to wish for it, and he has 'worn his singing clothes' longer than most of his contemporaries, deserving the price of long as well as noble service.''[1]

Not so, however, thought many others. Among those who took a very conspicuous part in the discussion of the appointment was Henry Fothergill Chorley. He was at that time musical editor of 'The Athenæum' and was further responsible for many of its criticisms

1 'Letters of Mrs. Browning,' Vol. I, p. 452.

of books. He was in many ways a man of fair, though of far from commanding ability. He had led a somewhat checkered literary career. He had written novels which had not succeeded, he had written plays which had not succeeded, he had written poetry which had not succeeded. Accordingly he may be said to have answered fully to that ancient ill-natured description of the reviewing fraternity which Disraeli was the last to formulate in a condensed form, that a critic is one who has failed in literature and art. In regard to this particular matter under discussion, Chorley had one set idea in his mind. A woman was on the throne. If the laureateship was to be retained, the proper person to fill it was a woman, provided one sufficiently worthy were found. Such a one did exist. She was Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Her he had had in his eye from the outset. In the number of 'The Athenæum' for June 1, he announced that as yet there had been no decision as to the holder of the post. Now for the first time he indicated his own choice in unmistakable terms.

Chorley was not the only one who took the position that since the throne was occupied by a woman, it was peculiarly fitting that the laureateship should be held by a woman. There was a widespread feeling that such action would be a graceful tribute to the Queen herself. Unfortunately for its advocates, she herself manifestly did not share in the sentiment. More than one female name was mentioned as worthy to fill the post. A reviewer, for instance, while urging in an influential periodical that the office should not be given

up, expressed a preference for the selection of a particular woman as its holder. "Had we a voice on the subject," he wrote, "we should wish that, in memory of the illustrious dead, and in the feeling of gratitude to one of the most graceful writers living, the laurel were bestowed on the wife of Southey, as the writer whom we have all known and all admired as Caroline Bowles."[1] But such nominations for the post were merely expressions of individual preference. As at this time Mrs. Browning stood at the head of all the poetesses of her country in popular estimation, her name was the one almost invariably mentioned, when a woman was mentioned as the proper one to hold the position. "In the reign of a youthful queen," wrote Chorley, "if there be among her subjects one of her own sex whom the laurel will fit, its grant to a female would be at once an honourable testimonial to the individual, a fitting recognition of the remarkable place which the women of England have taken in the literature of the day, and a graceful compliment to the Sovereign herself. It happens to fall in well with this view of the case that there is no living poet of either sex who can prefer a higher claim than Mrs. Elizabeth Barrett Browning." It is clear that the Queen, if she thought of the matter at all, was not in the least impressed by the desirability of appointing a woman to the office because she herself was a woman. She could not help being aware that so far as any glory would redound to her reign from the selection, it would come from the genius and not the sex of the holder.

1 'North British Review,' November, 1850, Vol. XIV, p. 167.

It is a singular illustration of the state of contemporary opinion that while Mrs. Browning's name was prominently mentioned for the post of laureate, that of her husband seems hardly to have been thought of, though during the fifth decade of the century he had published his series of 'Bells and Pomegranates' containing some of his finest work. If he was mentioned at all, it could hardly have been in any quarter which carried weight with the public. Mrs. Browning was doubtless grateful to Chorley for his championship of her claims, though at heart she was probably amused by it. She manifestly never entertained the slightest expectation of being named for the post; for her good sense never failed her, save in continuing to retain affection for her despicable brute of a father. Nevertheless her advocate persisted in vigorously urging her selection. But after the declination by Rogers, Leigh Hunt and Tennyson were the two poets who were the most prominent as candidates in the eyes of the general public. In regard to them Chorley assumed an almost aggressive attitude. In a way which now seems amusing, but must then have seemed presumptuous, he solemnly warned off both of them from aspiring to the position. It did not please him at all that Leigh Hunt should let it be known that he would be gratified to receive the appointment. No charge of that sort indeed could be brought against Tennyson. Neither directly nor indirectly did he make the slightest effort to push his pretensions, nor did he indicate in any way his desire for the office.

Still, Tennyson's poetical position had now become

so assured that it was inevitable that his claims should come up for consideration. As we have seen, his name had been proposed for the post on the death of Southey in 1843. That it should then have been suggested at all was evidence of the growth of his reputation; for any mention of him as a candidate for the position would have been hardly possible before the publication of the volumes of 1842. Even at that late day enough of the old prejudice against Wordsworth had still survived to provoke dissent at his selection, though it was in general little audible. But if objection could be raised against the one man who had come to be generally reckoned the first of living English poets, we need not be told what an outbreak of protest there would have been had the choice then fallen upon him who in the eyes of many was little more than the chief of a poetic school, and furthermore of a school for which they had no admiration, even if they did not entertain for it distinct aversion. But by the year 1850, the sentiments of the cultivated public had undergone a complete revolution. Tennyson had now come to stand in its eyes as the recognized head of the poets of his own generation. There was in consequence a widespread sentiment that if the post were to be conferred upon the ground of desert, he was the one upon whom the choice should fall.

But such were far from being Chorley's sentiments. In the columns of the weekly literary paper with which he was connected he gave again and again expression of his hostility towards any action of this sort. A few days after Wordsworth's death he observed that he

had been given to understand that the laureateship was likely to fall to the lot of Tennyson. Against any such action he protested earnestly. He declared he could not believe the report to be true. Tennyson's poetical claims had been already rewarded with a pension of three hundred pounds a year. To give him further one of the few pecuniary provisions set apart for men of letters would be a great wrong inflicted upon his brethren and "not justified by the pre-eminence of his desert."[1] It is manifest from the critic's subsequent utterances that he was not thinking so much of the poet's literary brothers as of his literary sisters. In the following week he corrected his mistake as to the amount of the poet's pension; but he insisted that this slip left entirely unaffected the objection to what he called the accumulation of literary benefices in a single person.[2] It is evident from Chorley's various utterances that in his opinion offices of this sort should be divided round. The eminence of the poet, due to the worthiness of his work, should not be the main consideration in granting this particular prize from the public treasury. "There is more than one worthy recipient of the laurel," he remarked, —"and more than one, unhappily, the state of whose fortunes makes it needful that the leaves should be gilded." According to this view, the laureateship was not to be offered to him most fitted by his genius to hold it, but to be treated as one of the

[1] 'Athenæum,' April 27, p. 451.
[2] *Ibid.*, May 4, p. 477.

offices to be distributed among the deserving who had the additional recommendation of being poor.

This view led him later to inveigh more than once against the selection of Leigh Hunt. He became excited when later the rumor reached his ears that this particular author was to receive the laurel. Accordingly he now proceeded to speak much more strongly than before. He observed that many of his contemporaries had urged this appointment. "We hope," he said, "no such injustice, in all senses of the word, will be committed." The references he made to his candidacy were far from complimentary. His views as to Hunt's poetical position varied widely from those entertained by Hunt himself. If ability in that particular were to be regarded as the only consideration, his claims were far below those of Tennyson. If the latter was ruled out by the fact of his having received a pension, much more would the former, who, in addition to his having received one, was distinctly inferior as a poet to his contemporary. To give the laureateship to him would be to prostitute the office "and to do great wrong to yet unpensioned genius which may *need* the profit that is legitimately its due." Once more he returned to the advocacy of the claims of the poetess whom he had already designated as the one upon whom the choice ought to fall. By conferring the position on Mrs. Browning, a graceful compliment would be paid to the youthful sovereign in thus recognizing the remarkable literary place taken by women in her reign. Then followed the only instance which has come under my observation—doubt-

less there were others—of the fact that Browning himself was looked upon as a poet by any one of those who took part in the discussion. "This appropriation of the laurel," Chorley remarked, "has another argument in its favour:—it would in a manner recompense two poets by a single act."[1]

But while controversy on the subject was still going on, 'In Memoriam' was published. Tennyson's prospects for the gift of the laurel had been bright before, so far as that depended on the favor of the public. Still they could hardly be called certain. The appearance, however, of this work changed at once the whole situation. It made his superiority to any possible aspirant so manifest that the claims of all others were cast utterly in the shade by comparison with those of the poet, who, by this last poem had established himself firmly in the regard of the English-speaking people everywhere. With the passing of every week, the recognition of his pre-eminence became more significantly notable and noticeable. In the eyes of the cultivated classes he was the one marked out to be the coming wearer of the laurel. The public voice was heeded by the court. In truth, it was doubtless the same as its own voice. On the third of October, a letter of inquiry about Tennyson was addressed by Lord John Russell to Rogers. Its purport was not to ask about Tennyson's poetical fitness, but to gain some knowledge of his personal character. The prime minister was in this instance acting as the mouthpiece of the Queen. He expressly said that her Majesty

[1] 'Athenæum,' June 22, p. 662.

was inclined to bestow the office on Mr. Tennyson.[1] According to the statement made in the authorized life of the poet, his selection for the post was chiefly due to the admiration of Prince Albert for 'In Memoriam.' How the result was actually reached—whether the Queen influenced the Prince Consort or the Prince Consort influenced the Queen, or whether both came independently to the same conclusion—may never be definitely known. What is certain is, that the opinion of the two highest persons in the state accorded with that of the public.

Tennyson himself had not made the slightest effort, either by word or act, to secure the position or even to indicate the least desire for it. Still he could hardly have been ignorant that his name had been very frequently mentioned in connection with the post. A singular story is told that the night before he received the notice of the intended appointment—which was that of November 4—he dreamt that Prince Albert came and kissed him on the cheek and that his comment to himself on the act was "Very kind but very German.'"[2] On the following morning the official notice reached him from Windsor Castle that the position had been offered to him as a mark of her Majesty's appreciation of his literary distinction, and as an indication of her desire that the name of the poet appointed should adorn the office. The disbeliever in divination by dreams may well believe that rumor at least of the Prince's desire that the post should be

1 P. W. Clayden's 'Rogers and his Contemporaries,' Vol. II, p. 354.
2 'Memoir,' Vol. I, p. 335.

conferred upon him had somehow come to the ears of the poet. Tennyson took a day to consider the offer, and on his announcement of his acceptance the appointment was made on the nineteenth of November.

There is no doubt that there was a substantial agreement among the members of the cultivated classes that the choice was not only the best but the only appropriate one that could have been made. Naturally there was dissatisfaction on the part of some. There was ignorance to be encountered, there was envy, there was jealousy. All this was inevitable. But the dissatisfied were so comparatively few in number and as a general rule so insignificant in consideration that their dissent tended rather to excite pity for their literary taste than indignation at their attitude. Among the dissatisfied, we are told, were some of the relatives of the dead laureate. They waxed exceedingly indignant at the choice made of his successor, though it is hard to see that it was any concern of theirs. They forgot, too, how unfavorably the appointment of Wordsworth himself had been looked on in various quarters. But there is no question that the selection of Tennyson met general approval and in particular the approval of what may be called Young England.

But one person there was who was very far from being satisfied. Nor could he be consoled. This man was Chorley. He always had taken himself seriously; and it was hard for him to conceal the indignation he felt that the one he had fixed upon as the recipient of the laurel had not been appointed—had apparently

not even been considered. He gave at once a most amusing exhibition of the wrath he felt for the little deference which had been paid to his views, and incidentally revealed the high importance he attached to his own position as a critic, accompanied though it was with a not unfrequent manifestation of critical incompetence. "The office of Laureate," he wrote, "after having been allowed to remain vacant so long, has been finally filled up according to that spirit of caprice which presides ordinarily over Lord John Russell's bestowal of the national gifts. The laurel has been given to Mr. Tennyson. We have already said, by anticipation, that, against this appropriation as regards Mr. Tennyson's fitness to wear it we have not a word to say. Poetically speaking, it has been often worse bestowed:—and, in fact, Mr. Tennyson is expressly one of those legitimately designated for the honour. But so long as there are others on whose brows it would have been as fitly placed—and so long as the nation has few literary crowns to give away,—we hold that the multiplication of its benefices to a single subject is in so far an abuse of the patronage which the Minister exercises in the name of the country. Mr. Tennyson has already had his unquestionably high title recognized in the form of a pension; and there are others the laurel on whose forehead might as fitly have received the Court stamp,—which happens to have a money value as all its worth."

Poor Lord John Russell, the prime minister, had in all probability as little directly to do with the selection of the poet laureate as Chorley himself. But when

we consider the names of those who have filled the post, it is hard to refrain from paying a tribute of deference to the ignorance or impudence of the critic—it is impossible to tell which was the predominating influence—in his remark that poetically speaking the office had been worse bestowed. Chorley returned to his idea that the offices in the gift of the Crown should be doled out, not so much according to the exceeding merit of the recipients as to their real or imagined need of money. This he brought out again in his final lamentation over the failure to bestow the laurel upon Mrs. Browning. "In particular," he said further, "the opportunity has been lost of doing an act which, while it would have been equally one of justice with any other appropriation of the office that could be named, would, as we have before pointed out, have had a peculiar grace and significance in the reign of a youthful Queen,—over a people, so striking a portion of whose literary force is for the moment constituted by women. This, however, we presume, was too chivalrous a view of the subject for the Minister,—who has a trick of looking for his favourites down the back stairs."[1] Exactly what meaning he meant to convey by the phrase "looking down the back stairs" is not clear to the modern reader. The most intent gaze in that direction would not have revealed the presence of Tennyson, who had held himself absolutely aloof from the slightest effort to press his claim for the position.

[1] 'Athenæum,' November 23, 1850, p. 1218.

CHAPTER XXII

ARTHUR HENRY HALLAM

The year 1850 was a peculiarly eventful one in Tennyson's life. In the early half of it he was married; in the latter half he was made poet laureate. But as regards the growth of his reputation and his acceptance by the world of readers, a still more important event had occurred. This was the publication of 'In Memoriam.' About two weeks before his marriage, appeared this collection of poems. It gave its author at once a place in the regard of his countrymen from which the most malignant assaults of his depreciators have never succeeded in dislodging him.

Before entering upon an account of 'In Memoriam,' it is desirable to give in detail certain facts—many of which are well known, but some of which have never been recorded—in the life of the man who was its subject. Arthur Henry Hallam was the eldest son of the historian, Henry Hallam. He was born February 1, 1811. His preliminary education was at Eton, which he entered in 1822 and left in 1827. There he made the acquaintance of Gladstone. The two became the closest of friends and companions. Boys at that school regularly breakfasted alone in their rooms; these two usually took that meal together,

either in the apartments of the one or of the other. They walked together, they talked together. They reached indeed what may be called the height of schoolboy friendship by corresponding in vacation. The intimacy is the more remarkable, because the future statesman was then a conservative of the conservatives, while the son of the Whig historian was naturally a liberal—though neither of these designations had become at that time a part of political nomenclature. They discussed questions of church and state, in which naturally their opinions conflicted. In his journal of May 14, 1826, Gladstone records "Stiff arguments with Hallam, as usual on Sundays, about articles, creeds, etc." In his later years the statesman came to believe that his friend was right in his views and that he himself was wrong. Still, at the time itself their religious and political differences did not stand in the slightest in the way of their thorough comradeship. In truth, they probably had the effect of rendering it still closer.

According to Gladstone's testimony, Hallam at Eton was "the best scholar (in any but the very narrowest sense) of the whole school with its five hundred pupils." After leaving it he accompanied his parents on a tour to the Continent. There he spent a year. Everything was favorable to proficiency in the subjects, whatever they were, on which he had set his heart. Those were not as now the days when rapid locomotion left comparatively little opportunity for gaining knowledge at first hand. Men travelled slowly, they observed closely. Instead of gleaning information

from guide-books, which then had no existence, they had to resort to the use of their own eyes and ears. They naturally did not cover as much ground as now; but they saw much more of the fewer things they saw and retained the memory of them more vividly. Eight months of the year Hallam spent in Italy. To visit that country still continued to be to most Englishmen the summit of man's travelling ambition. During his stay in it, he devoted himself with peculiar ardor to the study of its language and literature. In the tongue itself he made such proficiency that certain sonnets he wrote in it were, after careful reading and re-reading, pronounced by Sir Anthony Panizzi as "much superior not only to what foreigners have written, but what I thought possible for them to produce in Italian."

Hallam's father was a graduate of Oxford, but for some reason he preferred to send his son to Cambridge. This course was possibly taken under the belief that the severe mathematical training there carried on would furnish a better discipline for a mind which apparently tended in the elder Hallam's opinion too much to obscure speculative theories. This indeed he may be thought to imply in the memoir he wrote of his son. In it he deplored Arthur's indifference to mathematical studies. "A little more practice in the strict logic of geometry," he wrote, "a little more familiarity with the physical laws of the universe, and the phenomena to which they relate, would possibly have repressed the tendency to vague and mystical speculations which he was too fond of indulging." At the

same time, while this belief may have been a factor in determining his choice, it could hardly have been the determining factor; for it was to this same institution he sent his second son, Henry Fitzmaurice. Gladstone thought the selection of Cambridge a mistake. According to him Arthur Hallam would have found at Oxford studies in which he was pre-eminently fitted to excel, while in those which were essential to success in the sister university he had no interest, and to some of them he had distinct aversion. At Cambridge no undergraduate was then allowed to compete for the principal honors of classical study, unless he had attained a certain proficiency in mathematics. No such impediment existed at Oxford. There, accordingly, his friend would, in Gladstone's opinion, have attained the highest rank. This may be true. Still it has to be remembered that had Hallam gone to Oxford, he would not have met with Tennyson. The world in consequence would have lost not only one of its greatest elegiac poems, but the memory of the man himself would have passed away almost entirely, instead of being enshrined, to use Gladstone's own words, in "the noblest monument (not excepting Lycidas) that ever was erected by one human being to another."

One gets the impression, indeed, that Hallam himself would have preferred to accompany his friend to Oxford, and that the choice of Cambridge was due entirely to his father's wish and not at all to his own. The existence of this state of mind is suggested at least in a letter he wrote to Gladstone after his return

from the Continent. "I have been, I believe, somewhat changed," he then said, "since I last saw you. I have snatched rather eagerly a draught from the cup of life, with its strange mingling of sweet and bitter. All this should rather have come after my three years of college than before; but nothing can cancel it now, and I must on in the path that has been chalked out for me. I have no aversion to study, I trust, quite the contrary; though my ideas of the essential do not precisely square with those of the worshipful dons of Cambridge." These words seem to imply that he was not disposed to take kindly to the studies which in that institution were necessary to scholastic success. If so, his anticipations were realized. To many men of literary and philosophic tastes mathematics is a subject peculiarly repugnant. Such it assuredly was to Arthur Hallam. At times, indeed, he fell into fits of profound mathematical despondency. On one occasion while there, he wrote to Gladstone about the agony he had in dealing with trigonometry. If so comparatively elementary a subject as trigonometry could make him gasp, he would certainly have found insuperable difficulty in breathing at all the rarefied air of higher mathematics. As a consequence of the dislike he entertained for the studies which led to honors at Cambridge, he took no high rank in scholarship. But one far more than counterbalancing advantage fell to his lot. It was in October, 1828, that he came up to the university, where he entered Trinity. This was a few months later than Tennyson's arrival at the same college. Between him and the poet speedily

sprang up a peculiarly ardent friendship, though, as in the case of Gladstone, he was nearly two years younger. His precociousness, however, and his unusual attainments, invariably put him on a level with men older than himself.

After his graduation in January, 1832, Arthur Hallam took up the study of law. This was not because of any fondness for it on his own part but at the wish of his father. It was not a study which appealed to one possessed of his literary and philosophical tastes; but to it he applied himself dutifully. His health, however, had never been robust. The weakness of his constitution had always prevented him from taking part in the games in which his schoolfellows indulged. More than once indeed appeared ominous indications of the fate ultimately to overtake him, which awakened the anxiety of his friends; though probably no one of them anticipated that the end would come as early as it did. In later life, Gladstone observed that in his Eton days marks of his coming doom could be traced, after a period of exertion, in "a delicate but deep rosy flush upon his cheeks, reaching to his eyes." It is fairly certain that his health was not benefited by this compulsory attention to a study for which he did not care. In April, 1833, he was stricken down by a severe attack of influenza which confined him to his bed for several weeks and from the effects of which, it is probable, he never fully recovered.

Later in this same year he travelled with his father on the Continent. On the fifteenth of September while

at Vienna—a city which Tennyson could never be induced to visit—he passed away without warning. The father returned from his daily walk to find Arthur, who had been for some days indisposed, lying, as he thought, asleep on his couch. For an hour he sat reading, until the singular stillness attracted his attention. He went to look at his son and to his inexpressible grief and horror he found him not asleep but dead. The end could not have been at best a long time deferred. Owing doubtless to some inherited taint of blood, probably on the mother's side, the historian was fated to have die before him with one exception all of a numerous family of children. With a suddenness equal to that of the death of the son, passed away his wife and his eldest daughter Ellen; nor was the illness of his second son protracted. The medical examination in Arthur Hallam's case showed that the death could not have been delayed for many years, though under favoring conditions life might perhaps have been somewhat prolonged. "Those whose eyes must long be dim with tears," wrote the afflicted father, "and whose hopes on this side the tomb are broken down forever, may cling, as well as they can, to the poor consolation of believing, that a few more years would, in the usual chances of humanity, have severed the frail union of his graceful and manly form with the pure spirit that it embodied."

Arthur Hallam's body was taken to Trieste and from there transported by sea to England. On the third of January, 1834, he was buried in the manor

aisle[1] of the Clevedon church in Somersetshire about a mile to the south of the village of Clevedon. The church stands on a hill overlooking the water where the Severn empties into the Bristol Channel. In the middle of this same year the father printed for private distribution a limited number of copies of a book of four hundred pages entitled 'Remains of A. H. H.' This volume consisted of selections both of poems and prose pieces. Most of them had been printed separately before; but there were a few pieces which had never previously seen the light. The collection was preceded by a brief account of the son's life and character. To it were appended testimonials from three of his associates in school and college. The names of these were not given but they are well known. The first came from his Cambridge friend, Brookfield, the two others from his Eton schoolmates. One of these was Francis Hastings Doyle. The final tribute came from Gladstone. After the death of the elder Hallam this volume was given to the public in a new edition in 1863. In that it was accompanied by a memoir of the younger son, Henry Fitzmaurice, who died at Siena in October, 1850.

The tie between Hallam and Tennyson had become peculiarly close during their Cambridge life. It was made even closer from the time when the former visited the latter at his Somersby home in 1829. There he met the poet's sister Emily. Between the two

[1] In the memoir of his son, the father spoke of his being buried in "the chancel"; and this Tennyson followed in what was originally the sixty-fifth, now the sixty-seventh, section of 'In Memoriam.' When he came to know the truth, he substituted "the dark church."

sprang up an attachment which in a short period deepened into intense love on both sides. Early in 1831 they had pledged themselves to each other. They were at the time little more than boy and girl. Hallam was then of the age of twenty and Emily Tennyson was about two thirds of a year younger. But on the part of both it was something more than the fancy of the moment which comes and goes with the passing of a few careless months. Hostility to the match on the part of the Tennysons there could well be none. Hallam's position in life, besides the intimate friendship which existed between him and the brother of the woman he loved, precluded the possibility of any objection coming from that quarter to his marrying the sister. It was from the Hallams, if from any one, that opposition to the union was to be expected. In particular, the consent of the father, upon whom the son was dependent, was imperatively needed.

One cannot well resist the impression that this attachment of the eldest son to Emily Tennyson was looked upon with none too favorable eyes by the Hallam family. At least such seems to have been the case at the outset. It was certainly not unnatural that the feeling should exist. Arthur Hallam had not yet attained his majority. It was pretty early in life for one little more than a mere boy to mortgage his future unreservedly. He was too young to have seen much of society or the world. Wider experience might change, when it was too late, his judgment both of persons and things. To join himself at this early period with any one whatever in a union not to be

dissolved, might justly seem an act of imprudence, to call it by the least objectionable phrase. There were other reasons, too, which might tend to make the prospect of such a marriage distasteful to the family. Arthur Hallam was their pride and hope. With his abilities, with his prospects in life as well as with the position and reputation of his father, he might reasonably look forward to contract what would be a brilliant alliance. From a purely worldly point of view there was assuredly nothing to excite enthusiasm in the marriage of the son to the daughter of a country clergyman who had never been possessed of any but comparatively limited means, and was himself soon after dead. The bride would be practically penniless. Of her and indeed of the family to which she belonged the Hallams knew little or nothing save what the son chose to tell; and long-continued observation has demonstrated that the opinion of an experienced man, to say nothing of that of an inexperienced boy, about the qualities and perfections of the woman with whom he has fallen in love is hardly to be received with the trusting faith which is accorded to the words of a divine revelation.

Still, the father did not place himself in open opposition to the match. He simply pleaded for delay. He exacted a promise from his son that he should not see the woman of his choice until after a year had elapsed. At the end of that time Arthur Hallam would have attained his majority. In turn the father promised that if the two lovers then remained in the same state of mind, no objection should be raised to

their entering into a formal engagement. Furthermore, while not permitted to see each other during the interval, they were not debarred from corresponding. All these precautions against hasty action, which might later be sorely repented, were fair and just enough. None the less the prohibition of actual meeting was one hardly to be accepted by the lovers with thankfulness. In writing to Emily Tennyson in July, 1831, Hallam discussed the possibility of her being enabled to go to Cheltenham for the sake of her health. "Alas," he added, "change of place will bring you no nearer to me. Whatever place you make a Paradise of by dwelling there, for me the flaming brand waves round it and limits me to the wilderness of earth." Still the long months of weary waiting made no change in the feeling of the lovers. When the time was up, when Arthur Hallam had reached the age of twenty-one, he hastened at the earliest moment possible to Somersby. That place he reached late in the month of February, 1832. He left it after a few weeks' stay as the accepted lover of Emily Tennyson.

But the troubles of the two were far from being over. Neither one possessed the means which would justify their entering upon a married life. Arthur Hallam was dependent upon his father. At his father's wish he had taken up the study of law. To him it was eminently distasteful. In his eyes it was, what he himself called it, the driest of all branches of learning. Still, he applied himself to it faithfully. The one thing above all which kept up his courage in what he termed his slavery was the expectation that

through its agency he might realize the possibility of hastening his union with the woman he loved. This indeed he avowed to her more than once. "It is the hope of securing our happiness," he wrote to her from Croydon in September, 1832, "that I devote myself to a life so uncongenial to me." In a short time he was to resume his dreary task-work in London. "It would not do," he said in a later letter, "for me to play truant just at the beginning of my slavery; when I shall have earned my task-master's favour by my diligence, I may be let out of Algiers for a while." More than once he deplored the necessity which kept them so much apart. The long separation, varied though it was by frequent letters and occasional meetings, weighed heavily upon his spirits and could not have been favorable to his health. He chafed constantly against the bars which delayed their union. "Oh, it is a weary, weary time," he wrote to his betrothed in April, 1833,—"*three years* now since I have felt that you were my only hope in life—more than two since we plighted to each other the word of promise. It is indeed a weary time. In gaiety and in gloom, alone and in crowds, the one thought never ceases to cling to my heart, and by showing me the possibility of happiness makes me feel more keenly the reality of misery."

It was not till some time after the son's death that the elder Hallam saw the woman who was to have been that son's bride. In fact, for more than a year after the engagement had taken place, there had been no communication between the two families. Conse-

quently the father knew really nothing of her who was his son's choice, nor of any of her relatives save her brother Alfred; and of him he could have then seen but little. The situation was caused mainly by distance of space which in those days could render the possibility of acquaintance difficult, and that of intimacy almost out of the question. It was not till towards the tragic close that this barrier was at all removed. In the spring of 1833 a slight acquaintance sprang up. Tennyson then visited London in company with his sister Mary. There in April the two met the family between which and their own an alliance was in contemplation. The first meeting was not looked forward to with any pleasure by the sister, and in fact, with a good deal of trepidation. But everything went off successfully. Mary Tennyson found her way at once into the hearts of her prospective connections. Arthur Hallam himself was overjoyed at the result of this visit, and at the real good which he felt it had done. "Mary," he wrote to his betrothed, "is a decided favorite with all of us, and she has taken, I hope, one of her fancies to my mother. Alfred too has got up in my father's good graces." "I feel," he went on to say, "as if a great barrier was broken down between my family and that of my adoption. I have tasted a rich foretaste of future union. I have shown Ellen a sister. I have heard Somersby tones and ways of speech finding their way to the hearts of those who sit round the Walpole street fireside."

There is no doubt that this visit did much to reconcile the Hallams to the projected marriage of their son.

Unfortunately it had no effect in hastening it, though, according to Tennyson's own words, the time of their union had been definitely fixed before the departure abroad on the last fatal journey.[1] There is indeed something pathetic in Arthur Hallam's brief career that he should be condemned to pursue a profession he did not love and at the same time to be deprived of the companionship of the woman he loved. One who familiarizes himself with their story cannot but feel regret that this marriage so fervently desired might not have taken place at once; that two persons so passionately attached to each other should not have had the privilege of spending together a portion of time which under the most favorable circumstances could have been at most the little that would have been allotted. Yet such is the influence of the mind upon the body that it might have lengthened Arthur Hallam's too brief existence. One, two, three years, or even more of a happy married life might have been theirs before the doom fell which was to separate them forever. At the same time Hallam's father acted from the best of motives. Prudentially, his course was perfectly justifiable, in spite of the sickness of heart which came to the lovers from hope deferred. Could the death of his son have been foreseen, the father's conduct might and probably would have been different. Very possibly he came to regret that he had not sanctioned the union of the lovers, so that at least some months if not years of married felicity might have fallen to Arthur's lot before his untimely death. At

1 'Memoir,' Vol. I, p. 304.

all events, he granted to his son's destined bride an income of three hundred pounds a year, the sum which he had previously allowed to the son himself;[1] nor did he withdraw it after her marriage to Richard Jesse, a lieutenant in the royal navy. This event took place at Boxley in the latter part of January, 1842, the ceremony being performed by the Reverend William Jesse, vicar of Margeretting in the county of Kent. Upon the Hallams and their immediate circle the announcement of the engagement and intended marriage wrought at first a painful impression. To them Emily Tennyson had seemed almost a widowed member of the house, and the sufferings she had undergone with the physical breakdown which had followed the death of her lover, led to her being regarded with mixed feelings of pity and romantic admiration. But time and reflection brought wiser views. Coupled with them was pretty surely the consciousness that it would have been little to the gratification of the generous nature of her dead lover, could he know it, that the woman to whom he had been betrothed should spend her own life in unavailing regrets and let sorrowful memories deprive her of the consolation of a home and children of her own.

To two members, in particular, of the Tennyson family Arthur Hallam's sudden and unexpected death came with as great a shock as it did to his own. Both to the brother and to the betrothed sister the blow was temporarily prostrating. Nor did either recover from it speedily. Emily Tennyson's health had been deli-

1 'The Journals of Walter White,' p. 141.

cate enough to excite her lover's apprehension during the period of their engagement. Necessarily it was not benefited by this unexpected and crushing calamity. For many months she was ill, and though she recovered, she recovered very slowly. At times she was almost inclined to despair of her own life. "We were waiting for her," wrote later one of her friends, "in the drawing-room the first day since her loss that she had been able to meet anyone, and she came at last, dressed in deep mourning, a shadow of her former self, but with one white rose in her black hair as her Arthur loved to see her."[1] As late as the middle of 1834, she had not met the Hallam family, though from them she had received the kindest messages. Utterly prostrated as she was in mind and body, she could not summon the mental or physical strength to make the journey to their residence. But to them she was at that time purposing to go as soon as she was sufficiently recovered from the state of weakness under which she was still laboring. "What is life to me!" she wrote to her brother in July, 1834, about the intended visit; "if I die (which the Tennysons never do) the effort shall be made." She expressed to him the great desire she felt to make the acquaintance of the Hallams, particularly of Ellen, who had been Arthur's confidante in his love affair. "She will perhaps," she wrote, "be the friend to remove in some degree the horrible feeling of desolation which is ever at my heart."[2] Upon Tennyson himself the blow was almost

[1] 'Memoir,' Vol. I, p. 108.
[2] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 135.

as severe. Under the influence of the first despondency which came over him, he began the composition of the poem entitled 'The Two Voices,' which consists largely of a discussion of the time-worn question whether life is worth living. Originally it was styled 'The Thoughts of a Suicide.' Then also he began and continued at intervals for a long period of years the composition of the various pieces which were later to make up the volume soon to be considered.

About Hallam himself and his commanding ability and lofty character there is a singular unanimity of opinion among those with whom he came in close contact. We are far from being limited to the tribute paid by Tennyson to the memory of his friend. The sentiments he expressed were shared by every one of the immediate circle with which the dead man was connected. It is well within bounds to say that no one, whose life was so early cut short, received more genuine tributes of the highest kind to the possibilities that lay in his future. The testimonials are not merely exceptional in the loftiness of the estimate expressed, they are rendered more exceptional from the character of those who express them. They came from men who were themselves to become on various lines among the most noted of their generation. Their utterances show the profound impression which Arthur Hallam made upon all his associates. In the circle by which he was surrounded at Cambridge he was generally, perhaps universally, reckoned the foremost; and this too from the very outset. Individual testimonies all agree. On more than one occasion Milnes bore witness

to his superiority. In December of the very year Hallam entered the university, he wrote about him to his father. "I have a very deep respect for Hallam," he said. "Thirlwall is actually captivated with him. He really seems to know everything, from metaphysics to cookery."[1] Too much importance may easily be attached to the admiration of a boy for a boy, but the opinion of the historian, then in the full maturity of his powers, cannot so easily be set aside. Later Milnes repeated even more strongly his first impression. He "is the only man here of my own standing before whom I bow in conscious inferiority in every thing," he said in a letter of February, 1829.[2]

The sudden death of Hallam brought out these testimonials to his eminence in profusion. To his sister Frances, John Mitchell Kemble sent the news of the unexpected tragedy. "It is," he wrote, "with feelings of inexpressible pain that I announce to you the death of poor Arthur Hallam, who expired suddenly from an attack of apoplexy at Vienna on the 13th of last month. Though this was always feared by us as likely to occur, the shock has been a bitter one to bear; and most of all to the Tennysons, whose sister Emily he was to have married. I have not yet had the courage to write to Alfred. This is a loss which will most assuredly be felt by this age, for if ever man was born for great things, he was. Never was a more powerful intellect joined to a purer and holier heart; and the whole illuminated with the richest imagination,

[1] R. M. Milnes's 'Life and Letters,' Vol. I, p. 59, Letter of December 8, 1829.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 62.

with the most sparkling, yet the kindest wit." In a similar strain Alford paid his tribute. In a letter of 1833 he spoke of Hallam in terms of unmeasured admiration.[1] "He was," he wrote, "a man of a wonderful mind and knowledge on all subjects, hardly credible at his age—younger than myself. He was well acquainted with our own, French, German, Italian, and Spanish literature, besides being a good classical scholar, and of the most tender and affectionate disposition; and there was something admirably simple and earnest in all he said or did. I long ago set him down for the most wonderful person altogether I ever knew."

Later in his poem 'The School of the Heart,' published in 1835, Alford apostrophized his dead friend, though his name was not mentioned, celebrated his present achievement as the earnest of future achievement which was to be his, had he lived.[2] On other occasions, too, he bore in his verse similar emphatic testimony. So in the same style of unmeasured admiration spoke the calm and judicious Spedding. "The compositions which he has left," he said, "marvellous as they are, are inadequate evidence of his actual powers. . . . I have met no man his equal as a philosophical critic on works of taste; no man whose views on all subjects connected with the duties and dignities of humanity were more large, more generous, and more enlightened." Like witness to his repute among his early associates was borne by his Eton

1 Letter to Fanny Alford in 'Life, Journals and Letters,' 2d edition, 1873, p. 93.

2 Lesson V, Vol. II, pp. 65-66, edition of 1845.

school-friend, Sir Francis Hastings Doyle. In his 'Reminiscences' he tells us that "all of us, even Mr. Gladstone, I think, felt whilst conversing with him, that we were in the presence of a larger, profounder, and more thoughtful mind than any one of us could claim for himself." A similar opinion was expressed by Frederick Tennyson, who in 1817 had left the school at Louth, and had gone to Eton to finish his preparation for the university. "At Eton," he said late in life, "I think our impression was that Hallam, and not Gladstone, was the coming great man."[1]

To the tribute of affection and admiration which Tennyson paid in 'In Memoriam,' Gladstone's testimony to Arthur Hallam's powers ranks next in importance. On several occasions he celebrated the actual ability and possible future of his schoolboy friend. "There was nothing," he said, "in the region of the mind he could not have accomplished. I mourn in him, for myself, my earliest near friend; for my fellow creatures, one who would have adorned his age and country, a mind full of beauty and of power, attaining almost that ideal standard of which it is a presumption to expect an example. When shall I see his like?" At the very close of his life he repeated the same opinion. In an article on Hallam which appeared only a few months before his own death, he celebrated in enthusiastic terms the lost companion of his youth, and showed that the impression which the boy had produced continued still to exist in the mind of the man of advanced years. "It is simple truth," he

[1] 'Memoir,' Vol. II, p. 407.

wrote, "that Arthur Henry Hallam was a spirit so exceptional that everything with which he was brought into relation during his shortened passage through this world, came to be, through this contact, glorified by a touch of the ideal. Among his contemporaries at Eton, . . . he stood supreme among all his fellows; and the long life through which I have since wound my way, and which has brought me into contact with so many men of rich endowments, leaves him where he then stood, as to natural gifts, so far as my estimation is concerned."[1]

In considering the weight to be attached to these opinions it is to be kept in mind that those who expressed them were at the time of their utterance, in some cases little more than boys, and boys furthermore who were under the influence of strong personal affection. In those of the number who gave the later testimonies, they could hardly fail to repeat the impressions and beliefs of their early years. Moreover, Hallam's attainments—and for one so young they were unquestionably exceptional—were largely along lines about which his fellow students were not competent to form a judgment. Remarkable as they were, they were little likely to be characterized by the extent and proficiency with which they were credited by his admiring associates. All of us are disposed to attribute special breadth and depth of information to him who is conversant with subjects which lie outside of our own range of studies. He who knows something

[1] Contributed by Gladstone to 'The Youth's Companion,' January 6, 1898.

of which others know little or nothing is fairly sure to gain the reputation of being possessed of much more knowledge than he actually has. This, which is true of men, is much truer of boys. To them knowledge possessed by a schoolfellow along lines upon which they themselves have not travelled, partakes of the nature of the extraordinary. Here was one of their number who was more or less familiar with the tongues of modern Europe, of which most of them knew nothing at all. He spoke of authors who to them were at best only names, even if they were as much as names. It is accordingly not to be wondered at that an exaggerated estimate should be taken by them of Hallam's acquirements. Alford, as we have just seen, described him as being familiar with the literatures of France, Italy, Germany, and Spain. To have gained a really full and intimate acquaintance with a single one of these would have been almost the work of a lifetime.

In the regular studies of his course at Cambridge, Hallam did not attain high rank. The fact is not remarkable. It was not because he could not have mastered them; he simply had no taste for them. In some instances he had a distinct distaste. On the other hand, those in which he took delight and showed the highest proficiency were not of the kind that led there to scholastic distinction. Two honors, nevertheless, fell to him during his university career; but neither of these implied proficiency in the special studies of the course. One of them was a prize for an essay upon the philosophical writings of Cicero. This was printed by his father in the collection he made of the writings

of his son. In 1831 he obtained the college prize for an English declamation on the conduct of the Independent party during the Civil War. This has never been printed. He was graduated in 1832 without honors. But making the fullest allowance for his failure to achieve success in the distinctive studies of his course, it remains true that the impression he left upon all his associates, several of whom were to become among the most noted of their time in different ways, must be regarded as extraordinary.

Accordingly, with such testimonials, coming from so many and so varied quarters, it may seem presumptuous, not to say ungracious, to cast any doubt upon the fullest realization of the forecasts which were made about Hallam's future; to question the absolute correctness of a view which was based upon the knowledge which comes from intimate acquaintance. It is hardly credible that the man was lacking in the possibilities of highest distinction, who had attracted the peculiar regard and admiration of two persons in particular who were to become in their respective lines the most prominent men of their generation. There is little reason to doubt indeed that, in certain ways, Hallam, had he lived, would have attained eminence. He might have become what Tennyson prophesied, "a potent voice in parliament." He might have come to exercise distinct influence in shaping the policy and destinies of his native land. But even such fortune, high as it was, would hardly have satisfied the expectations of his admirers. It was no ordinary success that was predicted for him; it was to be

extraordinary. For us it is only by considering what he has left behind that he can be estimated. Tennyson said justly that

> The world which credits what is done
> Is cold to all that might have been.

It has to be cold; for the pages of history are strewn with the lives of men of unfulfilled promise, of men whose apparently high prospects of success have never ripened into fruition, and have sometimes ended in dismal failure. All this is not meant to imply that Arthur Hallam, had he lived, would not have fulfilled, at least to a great extent, the hopes of his admiring companions. Still it is noticeable that Gladstone in the last year of his life, in declaring his belief that his friend would have attained high distinction, added "as high as that attained by his distinguished father." But that father, justly eminent in certain ways as he was, was far from being reckoned among the greatest men of his generation.

So far as his actual achievement, while living, gives any forecast of the future, it is manifest that Hallam would never have gained distinction as a poet. The verse he wrote was good of its kind; but it is no better than what scores and even hundreds of accomplished men have written. It would have been worthy of high respect; but the world is overburdened with highly respectable poetry. The only reserve that Tennyson himself made in the estimate of his friend's powers was that though Hallam would have attained the highest summit of excellence in other ways, he would

never have become distinguished as a writer of verse. But would he have attained distinction as a writer of prose? Here is something more difficult to decide; for excellence in prose, unlike excellence in poetry, is not so apt to have its existence sharply defined at an early period of life. Still even in that period manifestation of a certain degree of skill in expression is likely to display itself. But in spite of Spedding's designation of Hallam's compositions as marvellous, there is nothing in his extant remains which indicates much promise of that kind. Solid qualities appear in them abundantly. There is every reason to believe that whatever he said would always have been worth considering for the material it contained. The knowledge would have been ample, the matter weighty, the thought occasionally profound; and it would have been characterized by a remarkable sobriety of judgment. But in what has been preserved, that indefinable something that we call style, which carries us along in spite of ourselves, which gives enduring charm to what would otherwise be perishable, this seems lacking. There is nowhere exhibited any of that lightness of touch, that grace, that peculiar happiness of expression, which indicates the existence of the consummate master of prose. It might have come in time; all that we can say is that there is little trace of it in his earliest production. As was the case with his father's work, the weight of matter is set off by little charm of manner; and without the latter, prose writing gives little prospect of present distinction or prolonged remembrance.

To an inquirer who expressed to him the disappointment he felt in reading the writings of Sterling, John Stuart Mill made the following reply. "No one," he said, "who had not heard his conversation could form the faintest conception of what he was."[1] To account for the effect some men produce upon those with whom they come in contact, the influence of the personal presence must be taken largely into account. So it may have been with Arthur Hallam, though his early death prevents any conclusion on that point reaching any higher range than that of conjecture. Still, the impression produced by the writings of his which have been preserved is that in the pages of 'In Memoriam' a monument has been erected to his memory loftier than any which it would have been in his power to build for himself.

There is one particular, however, in which no hesitation need be felt in expressing positive opinion. Personal characteristics Hallam possessed unquestionably, which to some at least will outweigh all conceivable distinctions of the intellect. These were the extreme sweetness and nobility of his nature, and the immeasurable charm of his manner. Character is something which can ordinarily be estimated with as much precision when life is at its beginning as when it has reached its close. To the loftiness and purity of Hallam's nature there is but one testimony. It makes no difference whether it comes from the affectionate partiality of relatives, or from the intimacy of personal friendship, or from the impression produced by chance

[1] Grant Duff's 'Notes from a Diary,' 1881-1886, Vol. I, p. 75.

meeting with strangers. Everywhere it is the same. Fanny Kemble was far from sharing in the extreme admiration which her brother expressed for his friend's commanding ability. She was herself never given to effusive overstatement. She never lost her mental balance, or suffered her judgment to be swayed by the enthusiasm of others. This makes the tribute she paid to Hallam's character all the more emphatic. She spoke of the almost angelic purity of his nature in the account she gave in her 'Records of a Girlhood' of the friends who gathered about her as she was entering upon her own career. "The early death of Arthur Hallam," she wrote, "and the imperishable monument of love raised by Tennyson's genius to his memory, have tended to give him a pre-eminence among the companions of his youth which I do not think his abilities would have won for him had he lived; though they were undoubtedly of a high order. There was a gentleness and purity almost virginal in his voice, manner, and countenance; and the upper part of his face, his forehead and eyes (perhaps in readiness for his early translation), wore the angelic radiance that they still must wear in heaven. . . . On Arthur Hallam's brow and eyes this heavenly light, so fugitive on other human faces, rested habitually, as if he was thinking and seeing in heaven."

CHAPTER XXIII

IN MEMORIAM

'In Memoriam' was published early in June, 1850. No work of Tennyson's had ever been ushered into the world with any, even the slightest, preliminary flourish of trumpets. But the indisposition to follow customary methods of attracting the attention of the public was never more signally manifested than in the case of this production. Reticence about it, both before and after its appearance, was carried to an extreme. No advertisement, not even the briefest, announced its coming till the actual day of publication. No preliminary notices of the work appeared in the press to excite the curiosity or the interest of readers. No name of the person who had written it was found on the title-page. Indeed, not only at the very outset, but years after its publication, when its authorship became well known everywhere, no indication of the source from which it came was given in Moxon's advertisements. It occupied a place by itself in the newspaper columns distinct from the other works of Tennyson. The title-page was blank save for the words 'In Memoriam' and the name of the publisher and the

place and date of publication. The obverse page bore simply the inscription

IN MEMORIAM

A. H. H.

obiit MDCCCXXXIII.

These words gave no hint to any one, outside of a very limited circle, of the personality of the man in whose memory the work had been written. Arthur Hallam had not lived long enough to make his name familiar to the public during his lifetime, and beyond a few relatives and personal friends it had at this late day passed into that oblivion which waits even upon those who during the period of their activity are fairly well known. With all this, there was no attempt to hide the authorship of the work celebrating him; equally there was no attempt to reveal it. This latter is certainly true so far as the poet himself was concerned. But Moxon was too shrewd a business man to let knowledge of this sort remain hidden. The name of Tennyson had now come to have a distinct commercial value. Consequently, though the publisher did not intrude the identity of the writer upon the reader, he doubtless saw to it that adequate information should be conveyed with careful carelessness to possible purchasers of poetry. As a result, both author and subject were at once known to many and speedily became known to all. Even a few days before the official appearance of the work, Mudie, who had just

set out on his conquering career as the founder of circulating libraries, advertised that fifty copies of Tennyson's new poem, 'In Memoriam,' could be had for the use of his regular subscribers at his place of business.[1] The early notices of the work had no hesitation in proclaiming its author, though they did not always state it as positive fact.

One amusing exception there was to this general belief and practice. A brief but highly eulogistic notice appeared in the columns of a London weekly a fortnight after the publication of the poem. From internal evidence the critic concluded it to be the work of a woman. The blunder was rendered the more emphatic because this same periodical had previously announced the volume in its list of new books as the work of Tennyson. Of that fact both reviewer and editor were manifestly unaware. "If by a female hand," wrote the former, "as it purports to be, we welcome to the Muses' banquet, melancholy though the music be, one of their sweetest minstrels."[2] Naturally better informed contemporaries were unable to refrain from speaking somewhat derisively of the critic who had hailed the rising of a new poetical star in a widow's cap. Even had the author's name not been judiciously furnished to the reading world, the poem itself would have revealed its authorship to any one who had made himself familiar with Tennyson's previous productions; and this number had now become large. As a reviewer of the time remarked,

[1] London 'Times' of June 3; 'Spectator' of June 1.
[2] 'Literary Gazette,' June 15, 1850.

in commenting upon the quiet way in which it had stolen into the world, "the most unostentatious publication, the most exemplary secrecy, and the blankest title-page, could not long have kept the public in doubt as to the authorship of these poems."[1]

Singularly enough the work ran the risk of disappearing altogether just before it came to be printed. The manuscript book containing it had been left by Tennyson at his lodgings in London on his return to the Isle of Wight. As soon as he discovered his loss, he sent word to Coventry Patmore, asking him to go to the house where he had been staying and recover if possible the work. Patmore acted at once. With some difficulty he succeeded in securing from the reluctant landlady access to the room which the poet had occupied but which had now been again let. The search was successful and the missing manuscript was forwarded to the author. Had it been lost, it would probably have been too much even for Tennyson's marvellous memory of his own productions to have reproduced it, at least in its entirety.

Only two poems were added to the work as the successive editions appeared. It originally consisted of one hundred and twenty-nine pieces which for the sake of convenience Tennyson himself designated as "sections," and two poems which served as prelude and as conclusion. The second and third editions, which followed speedily, contained no changes save the correction of misprints. To the fourth edition of 1851 was added what is now the present fifty-ninth

1 'Tait's Edinburgh Magazine,' August, 1850, Vol. XVII, p. 499.

section. This, though written before, had been suppressed. Nothing further was added till the publication of the miniature edition of 1870. Then appeared for the first time the present thirty-ninth section. With that the poem assumed its final definitive form.

'In Memoriam' had one distinction which none other of Tennyson's works had ever enjoyed. From the very moment of its publication it was greeted with an almost unanimous chorus of approval by the critical press. Inevitably there were degrees in the fervor with which the work was received; but as a whole the reviewers reflected accurately for once the attitude of the educated public. The latter indeed was so enthusiastic that hardly one of the former dared go so far in defying its verdict as to "hint a fault or hesitate dislike." Those who dissented from the general estimate did so silently; they rarely gave expression to their views in print. There were, however, occasional virulent attacks; and there was, of course, half-hearted appreciation.

One of the most singular beliefs entertained and expressed in several of the early critical notices was that 'In Memoriam' could not and would not be widely popular—at least this would be true of it at the outset. This was not a view taken by those who were disposed to regard the poet himself with a certain degree of indifference, not to say disfavor. Nor was it the view of the very few who thought poorly of the work itself. On the contrary, it was often held by some who were warm in their admiration both of Tennyson and of 'In Memoriam.' Most convincing reasons were given

for this belief. The subject, it was said, was by its very nature monotonous. A series of variations on what was essentially the same theme could interest only a limited number, in spite of the beauty of the verse in which the theme was presented. 'The Examiner'—its article was doubtless written by Forster—spoke of the work in terms of highest praise. It declared that 'In Memoriam' was "perhaps the author's greatest achievement." Yet it ended its review with the following prophecy: "It is not a poem to become immediately popular; the nature of the subject, the unavoidable monotony, and as it were weariness of sorrow, in whatever changing forms of beauty presented, would itself prevent this."[1] Still, the writer added, that by its appeal to the imagination, the reason, and the faith, it would ultimately acquire and maintain its hold. The same discouraging view of the success of the poems was taken by 'The Atlas.' "They are too mournfully monotonous," were its words. "There is too much of the egotism of grief in them to suffer us to encourage the belief that they will find as large a circle of readers as other emanations of Tennyson's muse."[2]

It might have occurred to these critics that 'In Memoriam' was a poem of almost universal appeal. Few are the households in which there are not vacant chairs. Few are the individuals who have not had to mourn the loss of those near and dear. To a world full of sorrowing hearts and of sad but sacred memo-

[1] June 8, 1850.
[2] June 15, 1850.

ries this work came as a solace and a help. Equally did it appeal to another class. Everywhere could be found thoughtful men haunted and perplexed by doubts and fears, uncertain where to find a secure resting-place in any possible solution of the ever recurring problems of human life and destiny. To all such it was an unspeakable consolation and a help to dwell upon the struggles of a man who had fought his way through honest doubt, who had triumphed over despair, who had encountered and vanquished the army of fears which had been assailing their own hearts, and had finally secured for himself a firm foothold in faith. In truth his appeal, instead of being limited as even friendly critics thought, could hardly have been addressed to a wider circle of readers. Had Tennyson been seeking for immediate success, he could hardly have chosen a theme which would arouse the interest of more thousands. The effect it produced is brought out vividly in a letter of Archbishop Benson. "*In Memoriam,*" he wrote not long before his death, "was inexpressibly dear to me for the best part of my life. It came out just when my mother and Harriet died. I sank into it and rose with it, and I used to teach—to love it."[1]

The result certainly discredited all the vaticinations of the critical prophets. No book of poetry of any author of the Victorian era ever made at once so profound an impression upon the minds of contemporaries. This refers specifically to its influence; but

[1] 'The Life of Edward White Benson,' by his son, 1899, Vol. II, p. 412.

the influence was reflected in its sale. Never indeed has any elegiac poem in the English language, or perhaps in any language, leaped at once immediately into so wide a popularity. The 'Poems' of 1842 and 'The Princess,' from the point of view of great sale, had made their way slowly. Not so 'In Memoriam.' It shows how well recognized had now become Tennyson's position that the first edition of the poem consisted of five thousand copies. It took only six weeks to exhaust this number. In the case of his other works, it usually required some time for the public to recover from the foolish opinions of men of letters; but in the case of 'In Memoriam' no one troubled himself to wait for the verdict. In the middle of June the second edition followed. It in turn was followed by a third, which came out at the end of November. Nor did the demand then cease. A fourth edition appeared in less than three months, in January, 1851. Accordingly, within the year of its publication, four large editions of the poem had been put upon the market. No information has been published of the number of copies belonging to these subsequent issues; but they could not have been well less than the first, and were in all probability much greater.

The public indeed had waited for no criticism to declare itself. Its enthusiasm outran all the calculations of its literary advisers. Long before any periodicals had had the opportunity to express their judgments, the world of readers had taken the matter into their own hands. The very earliest notices of the poem, even when most favorable, were in a measure

guarded. Not so those which speedily followed. As in the case of 'The Princess,' the first utterances which were most outspoken in their praise, seem faint when compared with the fervid eulogies which soon came to be the fashion. Before the year was over, before it had in fact got well along, the critical estimate was marked by an enthusiasm which had never been manifested for any other of Tennyson's works. The 'Westminster' printed an article which was almost wildly enthusiastic in praise of the work. It gave in full fifteen of the poems, and it was apparently with some difficulty that the writer was kept from giving them all.[1] In truth, there was little limit to the panegyrics accorded everywhere. "No one endowed with a perception of what poetry is, could have closed the volume without a full conviction that it was the creation of the first poet of the day," said 'Tait's.'[2] It is "the noblest English Christian poem which several centuries have seen," said 'Fraser's.'[3] It went on to add in a reference to the anonymous character of the work, that the poet would have no quarrel with the critics who alluded to him as the author, "were he aware of the absolute idolatry with which every utterance of his is regarded by the cultivated young men of our day at the universities." The practical unanimity of fervent praise which waited upon the new work forms a sharp contrast to the recognition, at times almost grudging, which had been given to his two previous productions, favorable as that must be

[1] October, 1850, Vol. LIV, pp. 85-103.
[2] Vol. XVII, p. 499.
[3] Vol. XLII, p. 252.

considered in certain instances. For the first time in Tennyson's career, critical approval kept pace even remotely with popular approval.

Two reviews, however, may be singled out for their depreciatory character. One comes from an English and one from an American source. The latter is worth mentioning only as a curiosity in criticism. The former deserves a more extended notice, partly from the time when and the place where it appeared; partly because it embodied the usual stupid objections which were made to the poem; but mainly for the effect it wrought upon the feelings of a distinguished pulpit orator of the Church of England and for the importance he attached to it. From his first appearance in 1830 to the publication of 'In Memoriam,' Tennyson had been subjected to all sorts of criticism from silly panegyric to malignant depreciation. He had encountered feeble criticism, supercilious criticism, patronizing criticism, appreciative criticism, unappreciative criticism, just and discriminating criticism. But it was now his fortune to receive the attention of a critic who surpassed his contemporaries. To characterize suitably the folly of this particular piece of criticism makes one regretfully aware of the limitations of language. The writer, so far as inferences can be drawn from what he said, was a heavy, prosaic, muddle-headed man, who had read up several of the elegiac poems of the language for the sake of fixing pegs upon which to hang his discourse. His review appeared in the London 'Times' a year and a half after the publication of 'In Memoriam'—to be precise, on

the twenty-eighth of November, 1851. It was headed 'The Poetry of Sorrow,' and occupied three columns and a half. The title gave the critic opportunity to disport for a while over the field of elegiac verse; and he improved it so far as he knew. It was in fact one of those discursive reviews which deal little directly with the matter in hand. Accordingly, no small part of the article had nothing to do with its real subject. But the critic refrained at last from exhibiting his own extensive reading, and bestowed his attention upon what was set before him. In so doing he made two things manifest. One was his assumed knowledge and actually profound ignorance of the poet's literary career. The other was his open confession of his inability to comprehend the meaning of certain passages which it required peculiar incapacity not to be able to understand. There was indeed in this review a sort of perfunctory praise given to certain portions of Tennyson's work. The temper of the English people had now become such that this was an ingredient which the most censorious of critics felt it necessary to throw in.

Tennyson had at last won his way to the headship of English poetry. He had lived through years of indifference and neglect, of depreciation indeed and venomous criticism. With an astounding ignorance of these facts in his literary history, the writer of the article in the 'Times' began by paying a tribute to the easy path by which the poet had won his way to renown. "Perhaps of modern poets," he wrote, "Mr. Tennyson has met with fewest obstacles on the

high-road to reputation. The famous horseman of Edmonton did not find his gate thrown back with a more generous abandonment of the tax." Accordingly, as the critical turnpike had of late been carelessly attended, the writer felt it his duty to see that the rules of the road were more rigorously enforced. Thereupon he proceeded to point out certain leading defects in 'In Memoriam.' One was the enormous exaggeration of the grief. This was unreal, we are told. It produced a sense of untruthfulness which could not be removed. Far superior on this account were the lines of Dr. Johnson on the death of Levett. This single remark gives of itself a fairly complete conception of the taste and judgment of the critic. The second defect was the tone of amatory tenderness pervading the poem. This was something quite improper to be addressed by a man to a man. "The taste," he said, "is displeased when every expression of fondness is sighed out, and the only figure within our view is Amaryllis of the Chancery Bar." Still, it is fair to say that the critic was faithful throughout to his intellectual limitations. Shakespeare's sonnets, he tells us, were liable to the same objection. These as well as 'In Memoriam' must be condemned by the "tasteful" critic.

Another objection to the poem was the obscurity pervading many of its passages. This same sort of obscurity, it was added, ran more or less through all of Tennyson's productions. It was obscurity which arose not from excess but from want of meaning. The critic found much that it was impossible for him to

comprehend,—and after the manner of critics in general, he assumed because it was incomprehensible to him that it was beyond the limits of human comprehension. Unfortunately for himself, he made the mistake of citing several of these incomprehensible passages. "We have," he said in one instance, "applied every known test without detecting the slightest trace of sense." His lack of comprehension was due to his own lack of sense. He was furthermore shocked by finding that the language occasionally bordered on blasphemy. As if blasphemy were not enough, he charged Tennyson also with bad grammar. Here again he gave specimens of certain violations of the rules laid down by Lindley Murray. These examples of inaccuracy furnished, as might have been expected, conclusive proof that the reviewer's linguistic ignorance was on a par with his literary taste. Then came that solemn pronouncement which is the tag to most cheap criticism. "Small as this book is," he said, "it may be abridged with profit."

Along with its pretentiousness and arrogance, so much ignorance was displayed that the review excited among Tennyson's admirers merriment rather than irritation. Furthermore it excited amazement. The merriment was due to the character of the article; the amazement at the place of its appearance. Pope's couplet—

> The things, we know, are neither rich nor rare,
> But wonder how the devil they got there,—

expressed the feeling that generally prevailed. One of the consequences was that another writer set out

to review in turn Tennyson's critic. In this he entertained himself by showing the unusual limitations of knowledge and the unusual obtuseness of perception which had formed an indispensable requirement for writing the review in question. His article had for its title 'The "Times" and the Poets."[1] This heading had evidently been suggested by Tennyson's reply to Bulwer—'The New Timon and the Poets.' The writer took delight in explaining, as if to a dull boy, the meaning of passages which according to his own account the newspaper critic had tasked his mental powers in vain to comprehend. It required no David indeed to slay this stupidest of Philistines. In commenting upon the charge of undue amatory tenderness, he incidentally recalled to the attention of the reviewer the lament of David for Jonathan, and intimated that up to this time no one had dubbed the warrior king of Israel a sickly sentimentalist because of the intensity of affection he had expressed for his fallen friend.

One of the passages whose meaning he kindly explained to the reviewer is worth citing here because of the opportunity it affords of giving Tennyson's own explanation of how he came to write it. These are the lines referring to Hallam—

> And over those ethereal eyes
> The bar of Michael Angelo.

The reviewer in the 'Times' had not ventured to declare these lines incomprehensible. An uneasy dread that by openly confessing his ignorance he

[1] 'Tait's Edinburgh Magazine,' January, 1852, Vol. XIX, p. 18.

might be thought to expose the asses's ears too conspicuously led him to express himself with caution. "We shall not say," he wrote, "if we can comprehend the closing line. We can keep a secret." The secret which he dared not reveal his critic was kind enough to disclose. He referred him to so common a work as the 'Penny Cyclopaedia.' There under the medallion portrait of Michael Angelo which precedes the account of his life, the existence of the mysterious "bar" was plainly visible. The lines in fact were a remembrance on Tennyson's part of the words which Hallam had applied to himself in their university days. When asked later the meaning of the lines the poet recalled the incident which led him to make use of the phrase. "Those," he replied, "are almost Hallam's own words. You must have noticed in all portraits of Michael Angelo the bulging, bony ridge over the eyes, technically called by artists the 'bar.' Hallam had this bony ridge very prominent, and one day, when we were at Cambridge, he came into my room, and while talking, passed his fingers across his brow and said, 'Alfred, I've got the real "bar" of Michael Angelo.' "[1]

To the modern reader the only amusing thing about this mere twaddle of the critic is that any one should have taken it seriously. Of course Tennyson himself would always have to be excepted; for nobody could write anything sufficiently stupid not to give annoyance to that most thin-skinned of natures. Strangely

[1] 'Personal Recollections of Alfred, Lord Tennyson,' by W. Gordon McCabe, 'Century Magazine' (New Series), Vol. XLI, p. 731.

enough, there was another highly gifted man who shared in this feeling. This was the noted divine, the Reverend Frederick William Robertson. He was at the time incumbent of Trinity Chapel, Brighton. There he wielded extraordinary influence both with his hearers and with the outside public by the fervor of his eloquence and the exalted spirituality of his discourse. But though possessing many of the highest qualities of mind and heart, Robertson lacked almost wholly the sense of humor. It led him to underrate the intelligence of his fellow men. While other people were laughing not *with* the 'Times' but *at* it, he was transported with righteous indignation. He apparently fancied that this particular review would do serious harm to Tennyson's reputation, and affect injuriously the circulation of 'In Memoriam.' This was not because he attached any importance to the matter it contained, but because it had appeared in a paper wielding the supposed influence of the leading London daily. He appeared to believe that readers would forego the right of private judgment because an anonymous writer—very fortunately for his memory anonymous—had inserted a depreciatory review of the poem in this newspaper.

Accordingly, Robertson set out to show that the critic did not understand the scope of the poem and the idea which underlay it. This he did incidentally in the course of two lectures[1] which he delivered at Brighton, in February, 1852, before the members of

[1] 'Two Lectures on the Influence of Poetry on the Working Classes,' Brighton, 1853.

the Mechanics' Institute. It was no difficult matter to carry out his object. Assuredly it was labor thrown away so far as it aimed to counteract the influence of the article; for the article had exerted no influence. No one in fact but Robertson seems to have paid any serious attention to it. He seems to have forgotten that Tennyson was no longer an unknown and uninfluential poet. Tennyson had found his audience, and that audience consisted of the immense majority of cultivated readers in all English-speaking lands. Such men paid little heed to an article, no matter where appearing, which did hardly more than leave a mingled impression of the wordiness of him who wrote it and the wordiness of what he wrote. Indeed Tennyson had now become a far greater power in literature than any periodical—whether daily, weekly, or monthly—could ever hope to be. Still, Robertson's attitude is of interest as showing how great was now the hold which the poet had gained over the minds of the thoughtful men of his generation, and how quick they were to resent the derogatory observations of the few who succeeded in getting them into print.

One charge made by the reviewer excited particularly the wrath of Robertson. This was that of blasphemy. For the religious teachings of the poem he had unbounded admiration. "To my mind and heart," he wrote to a correspondent, "the most satisfactory things that have been said on the future state are contained in the 'In Memoriam.'"[1] This

[1] Stopford Brooke's 'Life and Letters of Frederick W. Robertson,' 1865, Vol. II, p. 79.

charge of blasphemy had been enunciated by the reviewer with an unctuousness which would have done credit to Uriah Heep. "Can the writer," he said, "satisfy his own conscience with respect to these verses,

> And dear as sacramental wine
> To dying lips is all he said.

For our own part we should consider no confession of regret too strong for the hardihood that indited them." One may well hope that it is not so, but it is to be feared that this piece of affected sanctimoniousness led to a feeble alteration in the first verse. The lines now read

> And dear to me as sacred wine
> To dying lips is all he said.

The change was made in the sixth edition, the first which followed the criticism in the 'Times.' It is one of the few changes for the worse which are found in Tennyson's poems. It hardly seems possible that the poet of his own accord could have substituted the prosaic *sacred* for *sacramental.*

It was nevertheless reserved for a reviewer on this side of the Atlantic to produce a criticism of 'In Memoriam' which, in spite of its brevity, made the article in the 'Times' seem painfully inadequate. It was a delightful specimen of original, or more properly speaking, of aboriginal criticism. The most desperate onslaughts on Tennyson of the decadents of the closing years of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth seem pale and bloodless beside the havoc

wrought by this wielder of the tomahawk of transatlantic criticism who had set out to secure and hang at his belt the scalp of the poet and incidentally those of the poet's admirers. The notice of 'In Memoriam,' short enough to be given in full, appeared in 'Brownson's Quarterly Review' for October, 1850. If internal evidence be of any value, it came from the pen of the editor himself. Brownson was a man of a good deal of repute in his time, though little remembered in these days. He was a redoubtable theological gladiator who had been at different times during his stormy career the doughty champion of almost every sort of orthodoxy or heterodoxy, and had never been able to find himself in complete accord with any one form of Christian faith. He had been by turn Presbyterian, Universalist, Unitarian. He had now for some time taken refuge in the Roman Catholic faith. There his orthodoxy was occasionally viewed with suspicion and even underwent investigation. In literature he was one of those who were disgusted with the vogue which Tennyson was more and more gaining. He was incapable of appreciating the poet and made no attempt to hide the fact. In his secret heart he felt that his indifference was a proof of his own supremacy. An inferior race of men lacking in courage and ability might like Tennyson; not so he. As a consequence he gave utterance to the following piece of criticism which should never be suffered to lie in its present obscurity; for he said on this side of the Atlantic what certain people on the other side felt but did not venture to express.

"This poem," remarked the reviewer, "said to be by Tennyson, is presented us by its publishers in all the luxury of paper and type. We find our contemporaries in England and in this country speak highly of it, and rank its author at the head of living English poets. We suppose we must be destitute of the bump of poetry, for we certainly are unable to admire Tennyson, or to discover any other merit in him than harmonious verse and a little namby-pamby sentiment. We broke down before reading twenty pages of the volume before us. It is doubtless all our own fault, and owing to our inability to detect or appreciate true poetic gems. In brief words, Tennyson is not a poet to our taste. That he has a poetic temperament, we can believe; that he scatters here and there a real poetic gem in his works, we are not disposed to deny; but to us he is feeble, diffuse, and tiresome. He strikes us as a man of feeble intellect, as wanting altogether in the depth and force of thought indispensable, not to the poetic temperament, but to the genuine poet. He seems to us a poet for puny transcendentalists, beardless boys, and miss in her teens.'"[1]

There is no question that this is a critical gem which should not be lost.

With the publication of 'In Memoriam,' Tennyson entered upon the fulness of his fame. All the obstacles which had stood in the way of his acceptance by the public had been surmounted. The long days of depreciation or of half-hearted appreciation were now over. For the next twenty years he reigned not merely

1 'Brownson's Quarterly Review,' Vol. IV (New Series), pp. 539-540.

without a rival but without any poetical contemporary being in what may be called speaking distance. During the period in particular covered by this work, he was in the heyday of his triumphant progress. To find in English literature any parallel to the general acceptance of his superiority we must go back to the time of Pope in the second quarter of the eighteenth century; or to that of Byron in the first quarter of the nineteenth from the time of the publication of the first two cantos of 'Childe Harold' to his death at Missolonghi in 1824.

Of course there were dissentients. Hostility there was, though it was rarely open. It found expression in anonymous attacks in newspapers to which the depreciator could gain access. But for a long time there was not much even of this. The men who thought poorly of Tennyson's poetry either kept their opinion to themselves or for their own sakes might better have done so when they published it under their own names. It had no effect whatever upon the reputation of the poet so far as the public was concerned; it was upon their own reputation with the public that the greatest damage was wrought. During the sixth decade, indeed, the domination of Tennyson assumed almost the nature of tyranny. The feeling prevailing during this period is strikingly brought out in a communication sent to the biographer of William Morris. It was written towards the end of his life by the church historian and minor poet, Richard Watson Dixon, Canon of Carlisle. Dixon entered Pembroke

College, Oxford, in 1851. While there he became associated with men—especially Burne-Jones and Morris—who were later to form a constituent part of the Praeraphaelite Brotherhood. The testimony he bore late in life—he died in 1900—gives the modern reader a fair impression of the extravagant admiration which was entertained at that time for the poet, particularly among educated young men. "It is difficult," he wrote, "to the present generation to understand the Tennysonian enthusiasm which then prevailed both in Oxford and the world. All reading men were Tennysonians; all sets of reading men talked poetry. Poetry was the thing; and it was felt with justice that this was due to Tennyson. Tennyson had invented a new poetry, a new poetic English; his use of words was new, and every piece that he wrote was a conquest of a new region. This lasted till 'Maud,' in 1855; which was his last poem that mattered. I am told that in this generation no University man cares for poetry. This is almost inconceivable to one who remembers Tennyson's reign and his reception in the Sheldonian in '55. There was the general conviction that Tennyson was the greatest poet of the century; some held him the greatest of all poets, or at least of all modern poets." The intensity of the admiration which then prevailed among the young men of the time is borne out by the Canon's concluding remark. "As to Tennyson," he said, "I would add that we all had the feeling that after him no farther development was possible: that we were at

the end of all things in poetry. In this fallacy Morris shared.''[1]

As already suggested, it is not meant to be implied that there was no discordant note in this unqualified admiration. That which had never happened in the case of anybody, no matter who or what he was, could not be expected to happen in the case of Tennyson. In him special limitations were perceived, or thought to be perceived, even by fervent admirers. The examples given, indeed, sometimes strike the reader as being rather the limitations of the critic than of the poet. Dixon gives as an illustration the attitude of Morris. That he described as a defiant admiration. ''He perceived,'' wrote the Canon, ''Tennyson's limitations, as I think, in a remarkable manner for a man of twenty or so.'' The examples given of this perception would now strike men generally as remarkable, though in another sense from that intended by the writer, even had they come from a man of twice twenty. ''He said once,'' continues the Canon, '' 'Tennyson's Sir Galahad is rather a mild youth.' Of 'Locksley Hall' he said, apostrophizing the hero, 'My dear fellow, if you are going to make that row, get out of the room, that's all.' Thus he perceived a certain rowdy, or bullying element that runs through much of Tennyson's work: runs through 'The Princess,' 'Lady Clara Vere,' or 'Amphion.' '' As the only one who ever made this discovery in the pieces specified, the criticism deserves mention. ''On the other hand,'' continued Dixon, ''he understood Tennyson's great-

[1] J. W. Mackail's 'Life of William Morris,' Vol. I, pp. 44-46.

ness in a manner that we, who were mostly absorbed by the language, could not share. He understood it as if the poems represented substantial things that were to be considered out of the poems as well as in them."

No supremacy of this sort can be wielded by a man in his lifetime save for a limited period of years. Dryden in his great political satire, in speaking of the fickleness of the English people in the matter of politics, observed

> For governed by the moon, the giddy Jews
> Tread the same track when she the prime renews:
> And once in twenty years their scribes record,
> By natural instinct they change their lord.

The same disposition shows itself in the case of their literary sovereigns. A really great author never loses a commanding position in the world of letters. But that commanding position in which there is scarcely heard a protest against his rule can hardly last much more than a score of years. Rival claimants to the throne will be set up by eager partisans. But after all, these are usually mere eddies in the stream of commendation. He is never displaced from his high position or even from the highest unless some man of indisputably greater genius arises. Tennyson's place at the head of English men of letters, though several times strongly assailed in his later years, was never seriously shaken during his lifetime. The limits of the present work do not permit the consideration of the reaction against his absolute domination which

first began to manifest itself during the closing years of the seventh decade. It never gained sufficient force to dethrone him; it had to content itself with proclaiming to select circles the rights of rival claimants. Occasionally cliques could be found who sincerely persuaded themselves that they had disposed of his pretensions to general recognition because they found a ready concurrence with their views in the small body of which they formed a part. As Tennyson himself expressed it, they took the rustic cackle of their bourg for the murmur round the world.

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